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POSITIVE BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION AND SUPPORTS IMPACT ON DISCIPLINE IN
AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

A Dissertation Presented for the Philosophy of Education Degree

Department of Teacher Education

317 Guyton Hall

University of Mississippi 38677

Alina Harges

August 2019

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this sequential-explanatory mixed methods study was to first determine what impact, if any, did Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) have on the number of office disciplinary referrals (ODRs) received by students after three years of implementation. The second part of the study was to obtain feedback, through interviews, from the administrator and certified teachers on their perspectives of PBIS implementation in this rural alternative school setting. Quantitative data was collected first followed by the collection of the qualitative data. This method of data collection was necessary in order for the researcher to make better sense of quantitative findings through the use of qualitative feedback. Quantitative data was collected from the School Wide Information System (SWIS) database, a system used by the school district to store ODR data. The qualitative component was analyzed from the PBIS school-wide evaluation tool (SET), and emerging themes from interview data. Findings from this study indicate PBIS does not have a significant impact on the number of ODRs received by students. Analyzation of interview questions, using the SET, indicates a lack of implementing PBIS with full fidelity. In addition to this, five themes developed through interview data indicating various aspects of PBIS implementation in this rural alternative school setting as well as concerns with implementation, which are consistent with the quantitative analysis and fidelity testing.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my devoted husband who has supported me throughout the duration of writing. Without his genuine love and support it would have been impossible to carry on and conduct this study. I also dedicate this work to my children who patiently endure the time it has taken to work on this dissertation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to start by thanking God, who is indeed the head of my life. God without you nothing is possible, and I can never thank you enough for allowing me to persevere throughout all of things in life I seek to accomplish. I would to thank you heavenly father for protecting and watching over me each and every day of my life. All the times I have considered giving up on trying to attend school and remain focused dear Lord you have strengthened me.

I would like to thank Dr. Nichelle Boyd-Robinson for always inspiring me to move forward in the field of education since being an undergraduate student at the University of Mississippi. Dr. Robinson, you have always pushed me to excel as a student and provided me with opportunities I never imagined were possible. I can never thank you enough for all you have instilled in me as a person, and I appreciate your willingness to serve as a teacher, mentor, advisor, and now the chair of my dissertation. I can honorably say your inspiration and support has made all of this possible.

Dr. Denise Soares I would like to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to transfer into the Ph.D. program for Special Education. Although this was a very difficult decision for me, your support throughout this program, as my advisor, has allowed me to gain a better understanding of how to plan, while still being a wife and mother. Thanks for your advice and all the times you have allowed me to express my thoughts and feelings as a student. You have truly been an inspiration to me. Thanks also for agreeing to serve as a member of my

dissertation committee. I truly appreciate your time and dedication as I have worked to complete this endeavor.

Dr. Sara Platt I would like to thank you for all of your words of encouragement since agreeing to serve on my dissertation committee. You have provided me inspiration and motivation which has helped me to see that this mission is not impossible. Thanks for your guidance and readiness to help without hesitation. Your time, dedication, and thoughtfulness are greatly appreciated, and I am grateful for your enthusiasm and willingness to serve on my dissertation committee.

Dr. Ethel Scurlock I would like to take this time to thank you for agreeing to serve on my dissertation committee without hesitation. Your help and encouragement throughout my entire journey at the University of Mississippi goes far beyond being a part of this process. Your continued help and support has always stuck with me, and I am delighted to know that you are still here guiding and supporting my educational endeavors. Thanks for all that you do and have done throughout my educational process at the University of Mississippi.

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I would like to thank my family for their support as I have completed advanced degrees

for the past sixteen years of my career as an educator. To my mother, you have always been by side through all I have desired to accomplish in life. You have never given up on me, and the discipline that you instilled in me is what has kept me grounded. For this I am forever grateful, and words can never express my gratitude. To my grandfather, you are the number one reason why I chose to become a teacher. Although I come from a family of educators, you were the one who always asked me, “Lena will you become a teacher like me?” Grand-daddy yes, I am a teacher because I have always wanted to be like you; so, thanks for allowing me to attempt to follow in your footsteps. To my grandmother’s thanks for the love, support, and compassion that both of you have always instilled in me. I have always been able to find peace in the middle of storms because of how both of you have calmed me my entire life. To my sisters, thanks for all the support and encouragement both of you have given me along the way. I am forever grateful to have both of you in my corner.

I cannot go without giving a special thanks to the following individuals: Dr. Thea-Williams-Black, Dr. Chrystal Hodges, and Dr. Tina Herrington. Each of you play pivotal roles in my accomplishments as a student and professionally. You have all been in my corner throughout the duration of this process. I appreciate the listening ears, advice, and encouragement you all have shown as I worked to complete my dissertation. Your generosity and encouragement are truly appreciated.

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A final expression of appreciation goes to the school district and principal of the alternative school for their willingness to serve as participants in this study. Without this school district’s consent, it would have been impossible to conduct this study.

PREFACE

This study was conducted in a rural alternative school setting located in North Mississippi. I was inspired to write this dissertation due to my personal experiences as an educator involved with the implementation of PBIS in schools. This piece of work is important to me because it will inform other educators about the importance of having systems in place to properly address discipline in alternative school settings. My target audience for this study is all educators responsible for addressing the behavior of students. My expectation from this piece of work is to inform others educators about the impact PBIS has and can have on student discipline in alternative school settings.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Teachers and school administrators are faced with creating learning environments which are safe and conducive to learning. Teachers implement varied methods for addressing discipline inside their individual classrooms, but there is a need to implement more school-wide approaches to establish productive school environments. As educational practices and policies in schools continue to evolve, there is a need for changes in how the discipline of students in schools is addressed. Netzel and Eber (2013) indicate the best proactive disciplinary practices are those which engage instruction in classrooms while minimizing problematic behavior. In order to address growing concerns associated with disciplinary issues, school leaders should focus on ways to create school climates dedicated to teaching students appropriate ways to conduct themselves in school in order to decrease high numbers of office disciplinary referrals (ODRs).

In efforts to assist teachers and administrators in providing students with structured learning environments, schools have turned to the implementation of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) such as positive behavior intervention and support (PBIS) and response to intervention (RTI). According to Swain-Bradway, Pinkney, and Flannery (2015), PBIS is a multi-tiered model designed for schools to implement practices which create positive school environments while decreasing disciplinary infractions, high numbers of school suspensions, and expulsions. Currently more than 18,000 schools in the United States have made the decision to

become PBIS schools (Swain-Bradway, Pinkney, & Flannery (2015). These schools are seeking to improve the overall culture, climate, performance, and problem behaviors within the organization. PBIS permits schools the opportunity to implement a school-wide framework which decreases the use of punitive punishments to address discipline (Jolivette, Swoszowski, & Ennis, 2013).

Sugai and Simonsen (2012) explain that since PBIS was initially introduced, deriving from applied behavior analysis, the model has changed from what it was originally designed to do. The start of PBIS placed emphasis on providing research-based interventions for behavior on students with disabilities (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). PBIS is a model that is structured to provide support for all students within the context of schools to address and improve both behavior and academics (Horner & Sugai, 2015). Therefore, schools no longer focus on ways to improve the education of just students with disabilities, but all students will be afforded the opportunity to receive interventions if necessary.

According to Simonsen and Sugai (2013), there are several studies indicating support for the implementation of PBIS in elementary, middle, and high school settings. However, there is a need to further examine how PBIS is implemented in more restrictive learning environments, such as alternative education programs (AEPs). Alternative schools too have the responsibility of creating learning environments which utilize interventions in order to decrease problematic behaviors. However, there is limited research available indicating ways in which discipline should be addressed in alternative settings using models such as PBIS (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). As a result of this, AEPs are in need of literature suggesting ways to build positive school climates focused on decreasing problematic behaviors while increasing the academic performance of students.

PBIS is designed to modify inappropriate behaviors in order to prevent the possibility of the following: high suspension rates, expulsions, increased dropouts, and incarceration (Jolivette, Swoszowski, & Ennis, 2013). AEPs are designed to provide students with problem behaviors and social skill deficits learning environments in support of changing problematic behaviors by using evidence-based practices such as PBIS to do so. Further research is necessary in order to determine the impact PBIS has on decreasing problem behaviors displayed by students in alternative educational settings (Jolivette, Swoszowski, & Ennis, 2013).

According to Pennacchia, Thomson, Mills, and McGregor (2016), AEPs have offered at risk students an alternate place to receive an education for the past fifty years. Students entering AEPs sometimes find it difficult to exit alternative settings and return to their host schools. Difficulties with meeting the exit criteria of alternative schools are attributed to the lack of successful behavior interventions (Pennacchia, Thomas, Mills, & McGregor, 2013). Therefore, to decrease suspension rates, expulsions, and issues leading to students being removed from their general academic settings, there is a need for alternative schools to examine the disciplinary process in AEPs.

As a result of school environments not being adequately modified when students transition back to their host schools, students can become repeat offenders in regard to discipline; therefore, having to return to alternative schools programs indicating failed interventions or the lack of response to intervention (RTI) (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). Bornstein (2015) explains that RTI is a very important aspect of PBIS which leaves little room for teachers to make assumptions about student deficits in the areas of behavior and academics.

RTI is a systematic practice which allows educators to use research-based interventions, consisting of three tiers. The three tiers are designed to change behaviors within each level of

tiers with varied interventions provided to students by teachers or instructional leaders (Bornstein, 2015). However, a team effort is needed in order to plan ways for students to experience success once the RTI process begins. RTI is a start of the process associated with PBIS which aids in changing problematic behavior in schools in order to diminish exclusionary practices. RTI along with PBIS can be used to provide students with structured learning environments applying best practices for teachers to address student behavior and academics (Swain-Bradway, Pinkney, & Flannery, 2015).

In order for schools to implement RTI in conjunction with PBIS, educators should understand each of the tiers associated with this process (see figure 1).

Designing Schoolwide Systems for Student Success

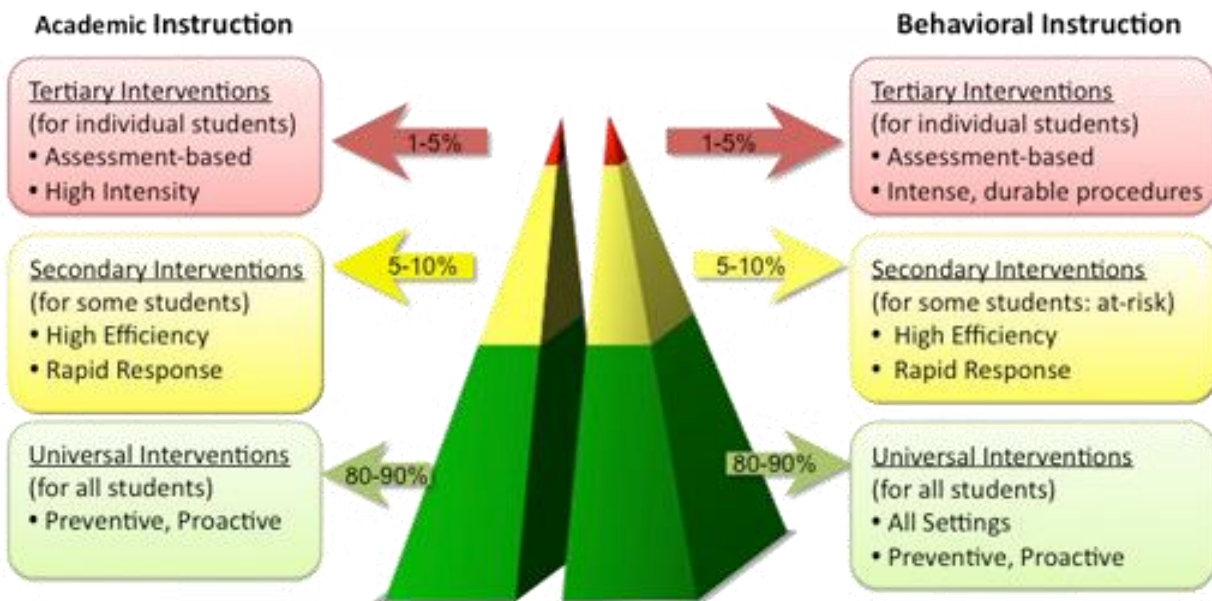


Figure 1. Shows how PBIS and RTI work in conjunction to provide students with interventions from PBIS.org.

Understanding all levels of the tier process is vital because teachers can be proactive in their approaches used to eliminate problematic behavior while increasing positive behavior (Scott & Cooper, 2013). In each level of the tiers, teachers are trained to provide students with varied levels of instructional practices and techniques. As students move up in tiers there is an increased need for more intensive interventions. When students move downward in the tier process this indicates interventions are successful, and there is a decline in the percentage of students in need of intervention and supports. A large percentage of students at the top of the tier model will be referred to receive special education services or are already special education

students (Shapiro, 2014). Students can receive referrals for special education due to a decline in their academics, and this can be associated with behavioral factors related to disabilities.

Tier one, the first level of this systematic process and often referred to as basic instruction, is where standard instructional practices and techniques are utilized in the classroom. However, when students fail to demonstrate success in their academics or behavior other interventions may be necessary, and students are then moved into tier two. In tier two, students receive further interventions and may need special instructors to provide more structured interventions with the help of special teachers, and in this stage of the tier process students are considered to be at risk. Tier three is the final level of the RTI and PBIS process, and in this level of intervention, students are displaying very intense behaviors and are considered to be high risk students. Students in this level of tier are students with special needs or students who are in dire need of teachers trained to manage behavior and academic deficits found problematic (Shapiro, 2014).

Although PBIS can be implemented across all educational settings, teachers in AEPs and general educational environments must be able to understand all that PBIS entails in order to effectively teach students the importance of schools adopting this system. Prior to the implementation of PBIS, teachers should receive on-going professional development on PBIS; therefore, procedures and goals associated with the implementation of PBIS must be well taught and modeled for students in order to help educators diminish high rates of problematic behavior exhibited by students (Landers, Courtade, & Ryndak, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

Although the impact of PBIS has been extensively studied in urban education settings, such as elementary, middle, and high schools, there is a need to further examine implementation

in other educational settings (Simonsen, Brittton, & Young, 2010). Simonsen, Brittton, and Young (2010) further explain that the impact of PBIS on problem behaviors displayed by students in AEPs in rural areas has not been adequately examined. Therefore, there is a need to conduct a study on the impact PBIS has on the improvement of student discipline in a rural alternative school setting.

While schools associated with school-wide PBIS indicate positive outcomes in regard to decreased referrals, suspensions, expulsions, and other exclusionary discipline practices, further research is necessary to indicate the impact PBIS has in alternative educational settings. Simonsen and Sugai (2013) explain how reactive approaches to handling discipline are used to address discipline in some alternative settings. However, reactive approaches do nothing more than further disciplinary issues and lead to unethical and exclusionary educational practices (Simonsen and Sugai, 2013). Therefore, additional research is also necessary to determine how the PBIS framework can be implemented in alternative educational settings to decrease disciplinary issues and while teaching students appropriate behaviors.

Purpose of the Study

Further research is necessary to determine how the PBIS framework is implemented in rural alternative school settings. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to first examine what impact, if any, PBIS implementation has on Office Disciplinary Referrals (ODRs) received by students in a rural alternative school located in a southern state. Another purpose of this study is to examine administrative and certified teacher perspectives on how the implementation of PBIS contributes to managing the behavior and academics of students in a rural alternative school setting.

Research Questions

1. Does the implementation of PBIS, with an emphasis on student behavior, decrease the number of disciplinary referrals received by students after three years of implementation?
2. What is the administrator and certified staff perceptions of PBIS in the rural AEP, as it relates to student behavior, post implementation?

Research Hypothesis

Ho1: There is no significant difference between the implementation of PBIS, with an emphasis on student behavior, and the number of ODRs received by students in a rural alternative school after three years of PBIS implementation.

Ha1: There is a significant difference between the implementation of PBIS, with an emphasis on behavior, and the number of ODRs received by students in a rural alternative school after three years of PBIS implementation.

Significance of the Study

This study on the implementation of PBIS in a rural alternative school will add to educational literature by examining and explaining the impact PBIS has on student behavior in this setting. The study will explain how PBIS in this setting is implemented in order to address and manage the behavior of students in rural alternative school locations. The examination of PBIS in this site will contribute to educational studies on PBIS in an area that has not been thoroughly examined. Additionally, the study will assist other educators in better understanding how behavior should be addressed in this particular educational setting. This study will contribute to the understanding of PBIS implementation by additionally informing other

educators on best practices used in order to change and manage the behavior of students in rural alternative school settings.

Limitations and Delimitations

Teachers could have high numbers of disciplinary referrals as a result of not understanding interventions used in conjunction with PBIS to limit the number of disciplinary infractions received by students. Teachers writing excessive ODRs may negatively impact the results of this study. In addition to this, new students enrolled in the school district can alter discipline data due to students' lack of understanding fundamental concepts associated with PBIS. Also, the possibility of inconsistencies in how students are referred to the office by school personnel can negatively impact the results of this study. The study will take place in an AEP that has implemented PBIS for at least three years. The study will be limited to a rural AEP located in North Mississippi consisting of data from students in grades 6-12 who have received disciplinary referrals while in alternative placement.

Definition of Terms

In order to address the purpose of this study, each of the following terms is defined:

Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS). PBIS is an approach used in schools which focuses on teaching students how to exhibit appropriate behaviors while integrating a three-tiered system of interventions and support to diminish problematic behaviors (Flannery, Fenning, Kato, & McIntosh, 2014).

Alternative Education Programs (AEP). AEPs provide students with an alternative setting to receive their education in order to decrease the number of suspensions and expulsions rendered in school districts; therefore, students are still allowed to receive their education in a setting which is more restrictive than their host schools (Gut & McLaughlin, 2012).

Office Disciplinary Referrals (ODRs). ODRs are referred to as the documentation used for teachers to provide an explanation of inappropriate behavior which has been witnessed or observed by students, and the documentation is submitted to appropriate administrative staff to render consequences for the infraction (Pas, Bradshaw, & Mitchell, 2011).

Fidelity. When PBIS is implemented with proper support and buy-in from at least 80% of the educators within a school, the system is being done with fidelity and instruments can be used to determine the reliability of implementation (Miller, 2016).

Response to Intervention (RTI). RTI is a systematic approach used in conjunction with PBIS in a three-tiered model in order to provide students with research-based interventions to change problematic behavior at various levels of the tiered model (Bornstein, 2015).

Assumptions

PBIS is a model which indicates the need for educators to implement this system with buy in and trust from all educators responsible for issuing students ODRs; therefore, it is assumed that teachers in AEP will accurately report ODRs in order for PBIS to be implemented with fidelity.

Organization of the Dissertation

This study, on the topic of PBIS implementation in a rural alternative school setting, is organized in five chapters. Chapter I consists of the following: introduction, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, research hypothesis, significance of the study, limitations and delimitations, definition of terms, and assumptions. Chapter II of this study is the literature review which addresses various topics associated with PBIS implementation. Chapter III of this study details the following: research design, population, sample, and subjects, procedures, human subjects' approval, data collection, data analysis, and conclusion. Chapter IV

of this dissertation will explain the results of this study. Finally, Chapter V will be organized explaining the summary, conclusions, implications for further research, and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this study details information pertaining to each of the following topics: Historical Overview of PBIS, Zero Tolerance Policies and the Need for PBIS, The Impact of Discipline Gaps on Achievement Gaps, The Implementation of PBIS in Schools, PBIS and Interventions, Implementing PBIS with Fidelity, PBIS in the Present, Alternative Models to PBIS and Punitive Punishments.

As educational practices and policies in schools continue to evolve, there is a need for changes in how the discipline of students in schools is addressed. According to Netzel and Eber (2003), research indicates the best proactive disciplinary practices are those which engage instruction in classrooms. Additionally, disciplinary practices should focus on creating school climates which are safe for students to reach their full academic potentials. In order for educators to address growing concerns associated with disciplinary issues, school leaders must focus on ways to create school climates dedicated to teaching students appropriate ways to conduct themselves in school. Therefore, strategic planning focusing on suitable techniques to address discipline is vital regarding building positive school climates.

It has been a traditional approach for schools to address problematic behavior in reactive manners. School administrators electing to use combative approaches to address disciplinary problems often results in students receiving harsh punishments. Harsh punishments often lead to

the loss of valuable instructional time needed for students to learn (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Instructional time is lost due to students being suspended or removed from school in support of exclusionary discipline practices. Exclusionary discipline results in the removal of students from their general educational setting to settings which are more-so restrictive or even out of school. Examples of exclusionary practices consist of the following: in school suspensions, out of school suspensions, expulsion of students, alternative school placement, and other change of placements for students with disabilities (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010).

According to Darensbourg, Perez, and Blake (2010), students most impacted by high rates of suspensions and expulsions are African American males and students with disabilities. Comparisons to white students indicate black students are expelled three times more than their white peers. Additionally, black students are suspended at a rate of 16%; whereas, white students on average are suspended at a rate of 5%. Students with disabilities are two times likelier to be suspended than those without disabilities. The suspension rate of students with disabilities is 13% in comparison to those students without disabilities being a rate of 6% (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

According to Skiba and Losen (2016), reliance on policies which exclude children are proven ineffective. Exclusionary practices do not lead to successful outcomes for students or schools exhibiting such practices, and these methods of discipline have negative impacts on the future of students. Instead of anything positive resulting for exclusionary discipline, it also leads to a decline in academic performance and lessens the likelihood of building trusting and safe learning environments for students (Howard, 2008). Additionally, implementation of exclusive

environments do not foster productive school climates and deprives students of their education (Skiba & Losen, 2016).

The application of “get tough” approaches to addressing discipline is deemed quick fixes. A quick fix tactic does nothing to change behavior. Subsequently, students tend to exhibit the same problematic behaviors. As a result, continuous disparities exist between the rates in which African Americans and students with disabilities are suspended and expelled in comparison to their white counterparts and students without disabilities (Skiba & Losen, 2016). This issue makes it evident why school officials need to address matters regarding school discipline, high suspension, and expulsion rates.

When addressing discipline in schools, it is critical for educators to maintain focus on why students are in school. Students are in school to be educated as mandated by the federal government. Any practice involving the removal of students from school ultimately undermines the ability for schools to adequately educate students while working to increase their academic performance (Irby, 2013). Therefore, there is a need for educators to foster school climates which promote being proactive in addressing disciplinary issues. This critical issue can be addressed in schools by using proactive measures. Proactive measures implement alternate strategies that are not harsh, pre-determined, reactive methods for managing discipline in schools. PBIS is considered to be a systematic approach currently elected by many schools in support of implementing proactive disciplinary approaches (Netzel & Eber, 2003).

Historical Overview of PBIS

In the 1980s researchers at the University of Oregon initiated studies in the area of behavior disorders. The researchers had the idea of implementing improved methods of monitoring and tracking the behavior of students while providing effective interventions (Sugai

& Simonsen, 2012). The study of behavior and ways in which educators should address behavior in schools has long been a topic of interest to behavior scientist and educators as well. Therefore, Robert Horner and George Sugai, engaged in studying necessary methods to assist educators with monitoring student behavior in schools (Critchfield, 2015). Sugai and Simonsen (2012) indicate PBIS derived in the eighties with the intent of being able to provide systematic ways to document behavior using research-based practices which would also give attention to the prevention of problems associated with behavior in schools.

In 1997 when the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) was reauthorized, a national center on PBIS was authorized in order to provide assistance to schools. This was done in efforts to exhibit ways to implement best practices in support of students with behavior disorders (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). Because students in schools have the following disabilities: behavior disorder (BD), emotional behavior disorder (EBD), or emotionally disturbed (EMD) schools must ensure they are maintaining the safety and well-being of all students. Therefore, the challenges in which schools faced with addressing behavior were critical enough for the federal government to legislate the roles and responsibilities of those responsible for educating students with disabilities (Sugai & Lewis, 1999).

Zero Tolerance Policies and the need for Positive Interventions

Zero Tolerance policies have been a practice which has driven the need for schools to proactively examine school-wide discipline. In 1994 along with the passing of the Gun Free School Act, came the concept of zero tolerance policies in schools (Monogan & Walker, 2012). At the time, zero-tolerance, in regards to weapons associated with multiple school shootings, was necessary in efforts to keep those in schools safe. However, it can be argued how zero-tolerance policies in schools do just the opposite of what was initially intended with keeping schools safe.

Although there is no clearly stated definition as to what it means to have zero-tolerance, what is clear is that policies associated with certain behaviors have already been predetermined (American Psychology Association, 2008). Therefore, many of the punishments rendered to students can be very harsh without giving regard to the magnitude of the infraction.

According to Ward (2014), zero-tolerance policies require automatic punishments resulting in suspensions and expulsions for things that could very well be harmless. For example, a student involved in throwing snowballs among a group of peers at a high school ended with the teacher being hit in the face with the snowball. As a result of this incident, the student was faced with suspension. However, a video surfaced which showed that the student did not intend to hurt the teacher, and this was the only thing that protected the student from being severely punished for this mistake (Ward, 2014). This is an example of why these policies can indeed harm students and have them removed from school for situations in which the student ultimately did not mean any harm.

Because of the high numbers of suspensions, expulsions, and legal ramifications associated with zero-tolerance policies, school districts have to re-think ways in which discipline in school is to be approached. According to Shah (2012) there are no studies indicating how schools can benefit from the implementation of zero-tolerance policies; however, there are indications which suggest there are many downsides to zero-tolerance such as not seeing any changes in the behavior of those who have been punished based on these policies. Additionally, in some cases these policies are deemed to be unfair to students and violate their civil rights (Shah, 2012). Negative stigmas linked to zero-tolerance laws indicate reasons as to why schools are considering positive ways in which disciplinary infractions should be approached in schools.

The Impact of Discipline Gaps on Achievement Gaps

As a result of students being removed from school due to disciplinary issues, it is important to highlight how high suspension rates of African Americans and students with disabilities is also referred to as a discipline gap. Discipline gaps reflect an issue in regard to ways in which students will maintain achievement in school. This is an issue because discipline gaps do nothing to close existing academic achievement gaps (Kinsler, 2011). When students are continuously removed from school due to behavioral concerns, they have increased chances of performing poorly in school. Therefore, removing students from schools can lead to failures for students in their behavior and academics. Existing disparities among suspension and disciplinary infractions remain to hold true even when black and white students are engaged in similar or the same actions (Monroe, 2009). Gaps in discipline are cited as being attributed to racial biases toward African American students and exist in virtually every school system as related to race and gender (Kinsler, 2011).

In 2011-12, there were nearly 3.5 million students suspended from public schools in the United States, and this is more than one student for every school teacher (Losen, Hodson, Keith, Michael, Morrison, & Belway, 2015). With such large numbers of students being suspended, this indicates a tremendous amount of instructional time being lost for students. The practice of suspending shows students are more inclined to fall behind academically as a result of being removed from school. Even though suspending students is a historical issue in schools, the topic on school suspensions remains largely ignored by those responsible for the education of students (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). Thus, there is a need for educators to examine how the discipline gap in schools should be closed.

Additional findings, consistent with previous studies, also suggest students most

impacted by high numbers of school suspensions and exclusionary practices consist largely of African American students. Research indicates that one out of six students enrolled in K-12 settings have been suspended from school. Additionally, students with disabilities are suspended in high numbers with more than 13% of all students with disabilities being suspended from school (Losen & Gillespie, 2012).

These findings suggest students with disabilities and African American students are at a disadvantage regarding being disciplined in school when compared to their counterparts demographically. Because school suspensions and exclusionary practices assist in failing to close existing academic achievement gaps, among students in schools, this also leads to other problems such as students dropping out of school along with increasing the likelihood of future incarcerations (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). Therefore, students need teachers skilled in being able to address discipline in the most effective and efficient ways possible to minimize the likelihood of negative outcomes for students.

In order to see a decline in the number of students removed from class, as a result of disciplinary infractions leading to suspensions, teachers should implement practices which build rapport and trust among teachers and students. According to Losen, Hodson, Keith, Michael, Morrison, and Belway (2015), creating safe schools by constructing positive discipline can be done by building better-student teacher engagement and parent-teacher engagement. In turn these schools will have higher academic ratings. Along with doing so, teachers of students implementing best practices tend to have less students excluded from classroom instruction. This is because they have established positive working relationships with the students and their parents. Therefore, educators and students can benefit from the implementation of building positive working relationships with parents and students. Henceforth, students are less likely to

be referred to the office for disciplinary infractions when they are actively engaged (Losen, Hodson, Keith, Michael, Morrison, & Belway, 2015).

On average students attend school for approximately 180 days out of each school year, and they are there each day for at least six to eight hours out of the day. While students are in attendance it is the educator's responsibility to provide students with productive learning environments in structured capacities with few distractions caused by students with problematic behaviors (Sugai, Horner, Dunlap, Hieneman, Lewis, Nelson, & OSEP Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions, 2000). With a growing number of increased demands for teachers to be held accountable for students' academic performance, it is imperative for teachers to be thoroughly trained on ways to maintain safe and well-managed learning environments where academics takes precedence over discipline.

Alternative Discipline Models to Punitive Punishments

Restorative Justice

Another alternative method to addressing discipline, which refrains from the implementation of policies aligned with zero tolerance, is restorative justice. According to Teasley (2014), restorative justice is a method of addressing discipline being implemented in over 12 states currently. Restorative justice is now implemented in schools to teach students how to develop values consisting of the following: building and strengthening relationships, showing respect, learning to take responsibility for actions, conflict resolution, and school community engagement and support (Teasley, 2014; Fronius, Persson, Guckenburg, Hurley, & Petrosino, 2016).

Restorative Justice (RJ), like PBIS, focuses on ways to avoid the exercise of exclusionary discipline practices and negative punishments. Instead, RJ places emphasis on the importance of

teaching students how to resolve conflicts by learning ways to repair harm inflicted on others through the teachings of conflict resolution (Fronius, Persson, Guckenburg, Hurley, & Petrosino, 2016). Students are given the opportunity to learn techniques to resolve conflicts, by bringing the wrongdoer and the victims together in a community of support, is a positive aspect of RJ in which schools are deeming a necessary means for addressing discipline.

According to Mergler, Vargas, and Caldwell (2014), RJ is a model which derived from practices in the criminal justice system and is indicated to be successful in how conflicts among individuals in this setting were taught to be addressed. Therefore, in order to decrease the concept of the school-to-prison pipeline, as a result of implementing exclusionary discipline models, schools have elected to implement this model in order to strengthen relationships among students with their teachers and school administrators. RJ circles is a strategy schools participate in consisting of students, teachers, and administrators where the person who has participated in wrongdoing which has violated others can be identified in efforts to right their wrong among those within the group. In this circle, the wrongdoer meets the person he/she has violated, and they receive the opportunity to accept responsibility for what they have done while getting to know the person who they have wronged and coming to a peaceful resolution to the problem without being removed from school (Mergler, Vargas, & Caldwell, 2014).

In order for schools to successfully implement RJ, there needs to be collective agreement among school officials and all faculty members regarding reasons as to why exclusionary discipline and punitive punishments is ineffective (Gonzalez, 2012). Implementing RJ also allows educators the opportunity to examine ways to better address the needs of minorities and students with disabilities without disproportionately removing these students from school in comparison to their white counterparts. Studies on the implementation of RJ in K-12 schools is

limited; therefore, researchers have been encouraged to conduct studies to determine if RJ could have a more-so improved impact on addressing the disproportionate disciplinary practices existing along the lines of race, ethnicity, and disabilities as opposed to frameworks such as PBIS (Hurley, Guckenburger, Persson, Fronius, & Petrosino, 2015).

Social and Emotional Learning

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is another method used in schools with the intent of teaching students' appropriate ways to behave without the use of punitive punishments to address discipline. Mergler, Vargas, and Caldwell (2014), explain that SEL is a research-based approach used to teach students skills which are critical in allowing students to learn ways to manage their emotions. In addition to this, the SEL approach, like PBIS, teaches students how to build positive relationships with teachers and peers while also learning ways to make responsible decisions.

Schools electing to follow the SEL model are charged with the responsibility of teaching students the core social and emotional competencies. According to Correia and Marques-Pinto (2016), SEL competencies consist of the following five core values:

- Self-awareness – identifying and recognizing one's emotions, strengths and the strengths of others, self-efficacy, and self-confidence.
- Social awareness – empathy, respect for others, and seeing the perspective of others.
- Responsible decision making – evaluation reflection, personal and ethical responsibility.
- Self-management – controlling one's impulses, managing persistent stress, setting goals, and self-motivation.

- Relationship skills – cooperating, seeking and offering help, and communicating effectively (p.62).

Universal SEL programs have been effective in altering the behaviors of students who misbehave in school, and schools applying SEL have seen academic gains with safer schools as a result of employing this approach (Mergler, Vargas, & Caldwell, 2014). Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Weissberg, and Schellinger (2011) describe the findings from a study conducted on SEL programs, and the study suggests how the meta-analysis yielded significant positive gains in behavior adjustments among students, increased academic performance with an 11-percentile gain in academics. SEL programs also work in favor of schools in decreasing what is referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline while teaching adolescents how to cope with difficulties, improving student's ways of thinking, and working to change the climate of schools (Yeager, 2017). SEL programs, like PBIS, serves as alternative for keeping students in school, and these programs are designed to teach students ways to manage social and emotional problems without the use of exclusionary discipline practices. Although SEL programs provide alternatives to punitive punishments, literature findings were limited on systematic ways to implement this program in schools or alternative educational settings.

Implementing PBIS in Schools

According to Goodman-Scott, Hays, and Cholewa (2018), there is not a definitive definition of what an urban school is. However, urban schools are described as those located in large cities having increased poverty rates, dense populations, are culturally and linguistically diverse, and lacking in resources. Educators in urban school settings face challenges with addressing discipline due to having large numbers of students who exhibit at-risk behaviors (Netzel & Eber, 2003). Lassen, Steele, and Sailor (2006) explain how these at-risk behaviors are

often displayed by students having social and emotional behavioral disorders leading to punitive punishments when addressed. Punitive punishments lead to exclusionary discipline practices. Exclusionary practices consist of in-school and out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and alternative school placements.

Even when schools have a curriculum in place to address social emotional learning, behavior management might not be adequately addressed (Cressey, Whitcomb, McGilvray-Rivet, Morrison, & Shander-Reynolds, 2014). Cressey and colleagues synthesize different components of classroom and behavior management into a PBIS framework with expectations summarized by the acronym CARE (Class, Academics, Respect, and Effort), “sunshine tickets” handed out to the students could be exchanged for various prosocial rewards. The pilot program started in one of the fourth-grade classrooms and gradually expanded throughout the two-way Spanish-English K-5 urban/suburban school over the period of five years. The school partnered with a university to provide training in collecting, managing, and analyzing data. In addition to the school faculty, the social worker and the school psychologist also were involved in developing and implementing the CARE program. The number of office discipline referrals increased at the beginning of the program probably as a result of more consistent teacher reporting, and improvement in data collection in year four and year five, accompanied with an increased number of students in the last two years. However, the authors also note that the school was able to make improvements on statewide tests in year five, which led to a change in status from level three to level two in the accountability system.

Goodman-Scott, Hays, and Cholewa (2018) conducted a single-case study design providing a rich description on how PBIS was conducted in an urban middle school. Goodman and colleagues interviewed one principal, four teachers, and one school counselor to determine

the processes and outcomes of PBIS implementation in an exemplary urban middle school and to address how leaders perceive the role of the school counselor within PBIS implementation. From this study's collection of data, five themes emerged: the importance of administrative leadership, proactive PBIS practices, creating consistency, building community, and school counselor integration (Goodman-Scott et.al., 2018). In addition to this, Goodman and colleagues show that there was an increase in academic performance and less disciplinary issues as a result of implementing PBIS with fidelity. Researchers from this study suggest there is a need to further examine the role of school counselors as leaders in the implementation of PBIS. Therefore, additional case studies are necessary in order to examine the role of school counselors in the implementation of PBIS.

In addition to PBIS studies in urban elementary and middle schools, a study of an urban high school investigated the impact of implementation. Bohanon, Fenning, Carney, Minnis-Kim, Anderson-Harris, Moroz, Hicks, Kasper, Culos, Sailor, and Pigott (2006) conducted a mixed methods approach using the following data sources: qualitative interviews, observations, surveys, and the school-wide evaluation tool (SET). The qualitative aspect of this study involved participant observations and naturalistic inquiry. The investigatory aspect of the study was used to develop interventions which guided the systematic implementation of independent variables. The study included a pre-post (AB) design used to compare the effects of the intervention between baseline and invention. This was a three-phase study which took place over a three-year time span (p. 135). Bohanon and colleagues' methods for data collection show increased levels of priority for implementing PBIS with a decrease in monthly office disciplinary referrals (ODR) received by students. Several dimensions of future studies were suggested by Bohanon et.al., in this study; one of significance is the need to examine how the implementation

of PBIS can be sustained over time when implemented in schools. Therefore, further examination of sustainability concerns should be addressed in future studies.

According to Simonsen and Sugai (2013), there are many studies indicating support for the implementation of PBIS in elementary, middle, and high school settings. However, there is a need to examine how PBIS is implemented in more restrictive learning environments, such as alternative schools and there is limited research available indicating ways in which discipline should be addressed in alternative settings. Though, it is indicated that discipline in alternative settings is more-so punitive for students than positive (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). As a result of this, alternative education programs need direction on ways to build positive school climates focused on preventative practices.

Positive Behavior Intervention and Support

One of the ways schools are beginning to address problematic behaviors, by using proactive measures, is through the implementation of Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS). This literature review provides insight on PBIS and the role it plays within educational settings in regards to addressing problematic behavior in schools. PBIS is a system designed to proactively provide interventions for students who struggle in the areas of academics or behavior with the use of interventions on tiered levels (Dunlap & Heineman, 2005). According Lane-Garon, Yergat, and Kralowec (2012), PBIS adheres to the three-tiered model designed to decrease disruptive behaviors through the implementation of universal supports and data. As a result of the increased need to address behavior in schools, PBIS has become a necessity for school districts to provide all students with learning environments which are orderly, safe, and conducive to learning (Bradshaw & Pas, 2011). Therefore, in order to build and create positive school environments, school districts implement PBIS with the use of research-based

interventions for the betterment of their students and schools in regard to education and discipline.

Response to Intervention (RTI)

The Implementation of RTI dates back to 2004, when the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) was revised as an alternative to the previously used discrepancy model (academic achievement compared to IQ) (Shepard & Lin, 2014). The law does not specify the implementation of RTI, but it does indicate the need for schools to use scientifically research-based interventions. Research-based interventions are necessary in order to prevent the possibility of students being inappropriately placed in special education classes due to the lack of providing proper interventions (Turse, 2015). On the contrary, the discrepancy model allowed students to fail prior to being identified as having a learning disability (Turse, 2015). Currently, response to intervention (RTI) is an integral systematic approach providing academic and behavioral interventions for students in a multi-tiered manner (Hite & McGahey, 2015). This model is frequently referred to as a method of prevention because of the ability it provides for educators to implement intense interventions for general education students' deficits in behavior and academics (Hite & McGahey, 2015).

According to Fisher and Frey (2011), RTI was designed to ensure teachers provide students with high levels of quality instruction and interventions making it less likely for students of color to be overrepresented in special education classes. Therefore, RTI allows teachers to identify those students in need of intensive interventions, provide interventions at levels appropriate for the students, monitor their progress, and determine if the students are responding to interventions provided (Shepard & Lin, 2014). Careful identification of students requiring interventions are made based on the use of data from scientifically proven interventions. The

utilization of data allows educators to implement RTI with accuracy and fidelity which diminishes inappropriately referring students for special education services disproportionately (Fisher & Frey, 2011). Educators are responsible for ensuring students are not labeled and inappropriately placed in special education programs due to academic delays and the lack of evidence based instructional practices (Turse, 2015).

RTI Components

According to the Mississippi Department of Education (2012), RTI consists of seven components which are essential to implementing RTI in schools. The essential components are as follows:

- 1) High-quality, differentiated classroom instruction aligned with State standards and grade –level achievement
- 2) Universal screening of academics and behavior using general outcomes measures (e.g., curriculum-based measurement) to identify students at-risk
- 3) Parental engagement in intervention process
- 4) Continuum of research-or evidence-based interventions of increasing intensity across tiers
- 5) Implementation of supplemental instruction or intensive interventions with treatment integrity/fidelity
- 6) Continuous progress monitoring using skill-specific and general outcome measures to determine response to intervention and/or improvement in outcomes
- 7) Data Team to collect and analyze data and to determine appropriate changes in instruction or intervention (p. 7).

The multi-tiered RTI model consists of three levels of tiered interventions. Each of the levels of RTI can be identified as follows: tier one referred to as the primary tier, tier two referred to as the secondary tier, and tier three referred to as the tertiary tier make up each of the levels of RTI (Shepard & Lin, 2014). Each tier is designed to increase in intensity as students fail to respond to interventions provided in either tiers one, two, or three. During each phase of intervention, teachers are able to monitor the progress of their students in order to determine ways to best meet the academic or behavioral needs of their students. Each of the seven essential components of RTI, described by MDE, is embedded in the multi-tiered process (Mississippi Department of Education, 2012).

Primary Tier (Tier One)

Tier one consists of all students, and in this level of teaching students are provided with high-quality instruction (Shepard & Lin, 2014). This level of instruction takes place among all students in the general education setting. If this stage of learning is impactful students will experience academic and behavioral success with little need for more intense learning (Hite & McGahey, 2015). During the primary tier, teachers deliver content using differentiated practices while also providing explicit instruction for all students (Mississippi Department of Education, 2012). Students are given feedback regarding their performance, and consistently taught expectations for learning. Expectations for behavior and learning are to be modeled by teachers in order to be mastered by students. About 80% of the student population will experience success in the primary tier when quality teaching is in place, and more intense interventions are necessary for the other 10-15% of students who struggle in this area (Shepard & Lin, 2014). The 10-15% of students in need of more intense instruction is provided interventions in the next level, referred to as tier two.

Secondary Tier (Tier Two)

Tier two is designed for those students who are nonresponsive to the primary level of instruction. Students placed in tier two receive more focused instruction, training, and support in targeted areas of weakness in order to provide necessary interventions. These deficiencies can be either behavioral or academic in nature; however, interventions at this level of tier are more intense and data driven than primary levels of support provided for all students (Carter, Carter, Johnson, & Pool, 2013). Shepard and Lin (2014) recommend the following interventions in the secondary level of the tiered RTI process:

Small group instruction, teacher-centered instruction, more frequent instruction, increased duration, educational experts, continuous progress monitoring, contingency contracts, self-management strategies, functional communication training, differential reinforcement, and social skills training (p. 260).

In order to determine if students are making sufficient progress, when receiving tier two instruction, teachers must continuously monitor the progress of their students. Progress monitoring is necessary in order to determine if students will require more intense interventions provided in the next level of the tier process (Carter, Carter, Johnson, & Pool, 2013). As should be essential in tier one, parents of students requiring intensive secondary interventions must be informed and engaged in the tier process (Mississippi Department of Education, 2012).

Tertiary Tier (Tier Three)

Shepard and Linn (2014) indicate the final stage of the RTI process is referred to as the tertiary tier, interventions provided to students in this level of tier are much more intensive and specific for individual students. Both general education and special education students can be placed in tier three for either academic or behavioral deficits (Shepard & Lin, 2014). Like tiers

one and two, progress monitoring is an expectation for tier three.

According to Scott and Cooper (2013), tier three interventions are designed to meet the individual needs of students. This level of tier implements the use of functional behavior assessments (FBA) along with behavior intervention plans (BIP). IDEA (2004) mandates the assessment of students having emotional behavior disorders for an FBA to be written (Scott & Cooper, 2013). Once the FBA has been conducted, a BIP can be written and implemented in order to assist the student with their behaviors. The BIP serves as a plan put in place to provide the interventions required for students in tier three with extreme behaviors (Scott & Cooper, 2013).

Students referred for tier three interventions consist of about five to ten percent of the student population, and these students are considered at risk in the areas of behavior and academics (Stewart, Benner, Martella, & Marchand-Martella, 2007). If the students are at risk, this indicates they are in academic danger or their behaviors are in excessive need of intervention. Behaviors exhibited by students in this level of tier pose potential threats to the school environment; furthermore, the small number of students represented in this level of tier cause the majority of school disruptions (Stewart, Benner, Martella, & Marchand-Martella, 2007).

Implementing PBIS with Fidelity

In addition to functioning as a system designed to address behaviors, if implemented with fidelity, PBIS can be used to create healthy school climates. Building healthy school climates, can be done by learning about all aspects of how PBIS works and is to be carried out in schools (Cressey, Whitcomb, McGilvray-Rivet, Morrison, & Shander-Reynolds, 2014). However, it is important to indicate PBIS could do the opposite of what is intended if the system is not

implemented as planned. Therefore, the quality of PBIS implementation is essential in order for schools to receive desired outcomes based on the school-wide or district-wide approach. For PBIS to be implemented according to models and frameworks associated with its implementation, quality training for all parties involved is necessary (Molloy, Moore, Trail, Van Epps, & Hopfer, 2013).

Consequently, training of all educators responsible for implementing PBIS should be required in order for the framework to be successfully implemented (Dunlop, 2013). Currently, there are over 18,000 schools in the United States implementing PBIS. Those schools which have been reported as employing PBIS with fidelity and support have seen declines in problematic behavior and increases in positive school climates and cultures (Swain-Bradway, Swoszowski, Boden, & Sprague, 2013). In order to thoroughly examine the impact PBIS is having on decreasing problem behavior in schools, fidelity checks are necessary (Flannery, Fenning, Kato, & McIntosh, 2014).

A study was conducted consisting of 96 schools located in the southern part of the United States. This study was conducted to investigate the relationship among the various types of training and coaching received by teachers. Findings from this study suggest schools benefit from intensive training when implementing PBIS in schools. Additionally, findings from this study are consistent with literature in support of providing intensive training to those schools choosing to implement PBIS with fidelity (Marlin & Filce, 2013). PBIS training is necessary in order to assist schools in implementing PBIS with fidelity, and in order to ensure fidelity is taking place schools can and should perform fidelity checks.

PBIS in the Present

Since the induction of PBIS, the focus has been shifted from the initial ideology of disseminating evidence-based interventions for behavior. The application was shifted to placing an emphasis on providing school-wide behavior support to all students, and this was done by the National TA Center on PBIS (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). For the past 26 years PBIS has been adopted by many as a result of its emphasis and implementation of the following: (a) evidence-based strategies; (b) the implementation of systems in support of sustained effective practices; (c) the collection and use of data for making decisions; and (d) the implementation process (Horner & Sugai, 2015).

Summary of the Literature Review

The implementation of PBIS in schools can play an integral role in how schools are able to efficiently operate. Having systematic disciplinary approaches, such as PBIS, in various school settings minimizes the likelihood of punitive punishments and promotes the ideology of having positive school cultures and climates with use of interventions. In addition to this, teachers will learn to spend more time focused on instruction and less addressing disciplinary issues in the classroom.

Although studies associated with school-wide PBIS indicate positive outcomes regarding decreased referrals and suspensions in elementary, middle, and high school settings further research is necessary to indicate ways PBIS can be impactful in alternative educational settings. Simonsen and Sugai (2013) explain how reactive approaches to addressing discipline are used to address discipline in alternative settings. However, reactive approaches do nothing more than further disciplinary issues and lead to unethical educational practices. Therefore, further research is necessary to determine how the PBIS framework can be replicated in AEPs.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Chapter three of this dissertation, divided into two phases, addressed each of the following areas associated with the study: research designs, participants, data collection, data analysis, and summary. Chapter three provides insight on how data was obtained, after proper research protocols were applied, in order to provide an analysis of the research hypothesis and questions associated with the implementation of PBIS in a rural alternative school setting. Furthermore, the instrument used for quantitative data in this study was student discipline data collected from the school-wide information system (SWIS). This interpretation of the quantitative results was followed up with qualitative interviews from the school administrator and certified staff of this rural alternative school.

Research Design

In order to address each purpose of this study, a sequential explanatory design was conducted. According to Johnson and Christensen (2008), the sequential explanatory design is considered mixed methods research because this approach combines both quantitative and qualitative data. In the sequential explanatory method of research, the collection of quantitative data is followed by the collection of qualitative data requiring the researcher to implement and follow two phases of data collection (Creswell, 2012). Conducting this mixed design allowed the researcher an opportunity to further develop what impact, if any, PBIS has on ODRs through the collection and analyzation of quantitative data. After the collection and analyzation of the

quantitative data, the researcher obtained possible clarification of quantitative findings by following up with a qualitative component.

Participants, Population, and Sample

This study will take place in a rural alternative school located in Northern Mississippi. There are a total of six schools within this school district. According to MDE (2019), the school district has a total population of approximately 4,000 students in grades Kindergarten through twelfth grade. Forty-nine percent of the students in this school district are African American students, and the 48% are white. Male students make up approximately 52% of the student population and the remaining 48% are female students. The alternative school, selected for participation in this study, is one of the schools among the population of schools. This AEP has one building administrator, five certified teachers, and four instructional assistants. All of these individuals have received PBIS training, and are expected to teach and implement PBIS strategies throughout the school. Each year this alternative school serves over 100 students in grades six through twelve.

This rural school district decided to implement PBIS in each of the schools in order to decrease disciplinary issues while improving academics and behavior. Because of the need to implement, first all school administrators, teacher representatives from each school, and some required staff were trained by a consultant specializing in behavior and PBIS implementation. This initial meeting was followed up by representatives going back to each of the schools, throughout the district, and training the remainder of the teachers and staff who were not selected to attend the initial training session. After teachers were trained throughout the district, all teachers were charged with the responsibility of going to their individual classrooms to teach school-wide PBIS expectations to all students. The school district also has behavior specialists,

serving all schools, trained on PBIS implementation and interventions.

PBIS training among teachers and staff is to be ongoing, throughout the entire district, in order to train teachers that are new to the district. In addition to this, teachers are expected to have ongoing instruction on school-wide behavior expectations in all schools including the rural alternative school. In order for the students in the alternative school to learn expected behaviors, it is important for all teachers to re-visit expectations for behavior consistently on a weekly basis. Teachers and staff use discipline data, along with the building administrator, to make decisions about processes that should be followed in order to properly address discipline. If any student is receiving high numbers of referrals, data is used to determine the time and location of the majority of the infractions, in order to develop plans for the students. This routine is necessary in order to ensure the effectiveness of PBIS implementation and to ensure data is being utilized to improve student behaviors.

Although the school district has elected to implement PBIS, it is important to note that the researcher is also a certified teacher in this rural alternative school setting. PBIS implementation procedures have been followed, but the researcher has no knowledge of how PBIS fidelity is measured or checked in this school or throughout the district. According to Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd, and Horner (2001), PBIS fidelity of implementation is measured using a tool defined as the School-wide evaluation tool (SET). The protocol for PBIS to be implemented with fidelity indicates how data collection should be conducted each year, prior to the start of PBIS implementation. In addition to this, the SET should be used to collect data on PBIS implementation after PBIS has started. Information obtained from the SET is used for each of the following:

- To assess features that are in place

- To determine annual goals for school-wide effective behavior support
- Evaluate ongoing efforts toward school-wide behavior support
- Design and revise procedures as needed
- Compare efforts toward school-wide effective behavior support from year to year (Sugi, et.al., p.1, 2001).

In order to successfully implement PBIS and conduct the SET, for data collection purposes regarding the implementation of PBIS with fidelity, a review of permanent products used by the school of implementation is necessary (Sugai, et.al., 2001). It is essential for the researcher to examine and collect products which can be obtained via student handbooks, district and school website, or visibly available to the public prior to the start of this study. Products to be collected or examined are as follows: discipline handbook, school-improvement plan goals, annual action plan for meeting school-wide behavior support goals, social skills instructional materials implementation timeline, behavioral incident summaries or reports(e.g., office referrals, suspensions, expulsions), office discipline referral form(s), and other related materials (Sugi, et.al., p.1, 2001). Evidence of the aforementioned products, which can be obtained without the need for consent, indicates to the researcher that the school has a system in place designed to implement PBIS. Physical evidence of these products also validates PBIS studies and allows schools to perform fidelity checks using the SET.

The rural alternative school, selected for participation in this study, has evidence of each of the following products. The majority of these products are evidenced in the student handbook, which also outlines the discipline plan followed in the school. All of the following products have been accounted for: discipline handbook, annual action plan for meeting school-

wide behavior support goals, behavior incident summaries or reports, and office discipline referral forms.

According to Horner, Todd, Lewis-Palmer, Irvin, Sugai, and Boland (2004), the SET is a reliable and valid tool used in order to assess the impact of PBIS in schools. As a result of schools implementing PBIS, reports indicate 20% to 60% declines in the number of ODRs received by students. In addition to this, the test-retest reliability of the SET averaged at a rate of 97.3%. This average was obtained from the SET scores of eight schools where SET scores were averaged in order to obtain the reliability of this instrument (Horner, Todd, Lewis-Palmer, Irvin, Sugai, & Boland, 2004).

Quantitative Question and Hypothesis

The first purpose of this study was to determine what impact, if any, the implementation of PBIS has on student behavior in a rural alternative school setting. In order to gain a clearer understanding of PBIS implementation in this setting, to address student discipline, the following research question were examined:

Research question # 1 - Does the implementation of PBIS, with an emphasis on student behavior; decrease the number of disciplinary referrals received by students in a rural alternative school setting after three years of implementation? The hypothesis is stated as follows:

Ho1: There is no significant difference between the implementation of PBIS, with an emphasis on student behavior, and the number of ODRs received by students in a rural alternative school after three years of PBIS implementation.

Ha1: There is a significant difference between the implementation of PBIS, with an emphasis on behavior, and the numbers of ODRs received by students in a rural alternative school after three

years of PBIS implementation.

Quantitative Data Collection

The researcher followed all protocols for conducting research. Prior to the collection of any data, the researcher obtained approval from the University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Proper consent to conduct this study within this school district was appropriately obtained before the collection of any data. The school district selected for participation in this study will remain anonymous, and the school site selected was only referred to by using one of the following pseudonyms: an alternative education program (AEP), alternative school, or rural alternative school setting.

As previously noted, the goal of this study on the implementation of PBIS, in a rural alternative school, was to determine if PBIS had any impact on improving student discipline in this setting. The idea, based on previous literature findings, is if students are taught positive behavior goals and expectations, provided incentives for being able to meet behavior goals and expectations, student discipline will improve. The researcher collected student discipline data from the 2013-2014 school years. This is the year prior to the start of PBIS implementation in this alternative school setting, which was also considered pre-implementation of PBIS, and provided baseline data representing disciplinary infractions. In addition to this, student discipline data for 2014-2015, 2015-2016, and 2016-2017 school terms was examined and compared to the pre-implementation data. This data consisted of the following: in school suspension (ISS) reports, out of school suspension (OSS) reports, expulsion data, drug and alcohol infractions, weapon infractions, and any other categories of discipline generated from SWIS. It was important for the researcher to examine the number of discipline referrals in each of the aforementioned categories in order to compare discipline data. Each year of PBIS

implementation data was compared to the year of pre-implementation to determine the impact PBIS had on student discipline in this rural alternative school setting. The researcher asked for a three week time frame for participants to gather ODR data from SWIS.

The researcher provided proper school officials with data sheets which were used to document all data received regarding ODRs. Data sheets were used for the organization of information obtained regarding student discipline data. Data sheet were utilized for each of the following categories: 2013-2014 ODRs. In addition to this, data sheets were utilized in order to document ODRs after the implementation of PBIS for each of the following school terms 2014-2015, 2015-2016, and 2016-2017. SPSS was used to test, analyze, and chart the results of this study.

Quantitative Design

Existing student discipline data records were used in order to determine how PBIS implementation impacted student data. Because this is quantitative data and groups are pre-existing the quantitative aspect of this study is quasi-experimental in nature. Quasi-experimental designs are conducted when the researcher is unable to randomly assign participants to a control group. The quasi-experimental design allows researchers to compare intact groups in their natural settings (Martella, Nelson, Morgan, & Marchand-Martella, 2013). Participant groups in the quasi experimental designs are pre-existing, and the researcher was unable to control for confounding variables. Unlike experimental studies, the quasi-experimental design is unable to account for confounding variables due to the lack of randomization in control groups (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Johnson and Christensen (2008) further explain that confounding variables consist of possible influences from the outside which can potentially change the overall effect of the study. However, these variables can be accounted for and explained after testing data.

Quantitative Analysis

Once data for the study was collected, the researcher performed hypothesis testing using the analysis of variance (ANOVA). According to Hinkle, Wiersma, and Jurs (2003), an ANOVA is a statistical test which is used to determine the difference between two or more means. Whenever an ANOVA test is conducted there are two variables associated which are the independent and dependent variables. In this study the independent variable is the implementation of PBIS with an emphasis on student behavior. The dependent variables were represented by ODRs received by students in this rural alternative school. The groups of dependent variable measured consist of various categories of student discipline data which can be generated by SWIS. Some of these categories are as follows: ISS data, OSS data, expulsion data, drug and alcohol offenses, weapons, fighting, and other disciplinary referral data which can be reported in SWIS.

ANOVA testing was conducted in order to compare the mean scores from the baseline year of data to each year of data that follows. The baseline data consisted of discipline data collected during the 2013-2014 school term, which is the control group for the study. The variables represented different types of ODRs, the experimental group, were measured by data from ISS, OSS, expulsion, and other disciplinary infraction reports. Data in each category was to be collected and compared to the control group for 2014-2015, 2015-2016, and 2016-2017 school terms. ANOVA testing indicated if there is any significant difference between the groups (school terms) on different variables when compared to the control group. All data for analysis in this study will be run using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Quantitative Instrumentation

The instrument selected for quantitative data collection in this study was existing ODR's, with reports indicating various disciplinary infractions. Discipline data was obtained from a database referred to as SWIS for the 2013-2014 school term. Disciplinary data is entered into SWIS daily by trained personnel, and this is a web-based program which keeps track of disciplinary infractions as well as the time and place in which the student infractions have occurred. Reports can be generated from SWIS indicating the number of referrals received by individual students; number of referrals administered throughout the school year, and can also produce graphs and charts representing disciplinary infractions. Following the collection of data, an analysis was made addressing the quantitative research question and hypothesis. This aspect of the study does not require the use of identifying teacher or student information; instead, the number ODRs received by students were examined and analyzed to determine if there has been a decrease in ODRs received by students in this rural alternative school setting.

Possible Threats to Internal and External Validity

Because quasi-experimental data is not considered to be a true experiment, the likelihood of having more threats regarding internal validity is posed (Creswell, 2012). Conducting research in schools, in some instances, does not allow the researcher to form groups. Therefore, group data was intact and randomization in these situations cannot occur. History could be a possible concern regarding a threat to the internal validity of the quantitative results in this study due to the time gap existing between the control group data (pre-PBIS implementation) and the experiment group. This could potentially pose a threat to PBIS implementation along with any changes that have occurred in how ODRs are received by students. Changes in district policies over the timeframe in which data for this study will be collected can impact the outcome of the

results. However, conducting proper statistical analysis will account for both internal and external validity factors. The quantitative component conducted ANOVA testing, and this statistical analysis allowed the researcher to control and account for errors and outside factors which could negatively impact the results of this study (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 2003).

Qualitative Question

The second part of this study examined administrative and certified staff perspectives of ODR's and how PBIS implementation has impacted student discipline in this rural alternative school setting. The collection of qualitative data explored the following:

Research question # 2 - What are the administrative and staff perceptions of PBIS in the rural AEP, as it relates to student behavior and discipline post PBIS implementation?

Qualitative Data Collection

After receiving approval from the University of Mississippi's IRB, a letter of recruitment was sent to the school district seeking permission to conduct this study. The letter provided to administrators responsible for granting permission to conduct interviews with certified staff in this alternative school setting. This was followed by providing a letter of informed consent to all staff members willing to participate in the interview component of the study. After receiving informed consent from participants, the researcher spent approximately two weeks conducting interviews in private settings. Participants will be informed that they did not have to answer questions which may potentially cause them to feel uncomfortable regarding PBIS and student behavior in this alternative school setting. The researcher explained to participants that all interview data is anonymous, pseudonyms will be given to each interviewee in order to protect their identity. In addition to this, only the researcher will have access to the data which will be kept and stored on an external hard drive for three years in a locked safe.

Qualitative Instrumentation

Interview questions were used to yield qualitative feedback from participants in this study. According to Martella, Nelson, Morgan, and Marchand-Martella (2013), interviews allow the researcher to have direct interactions among one another and also allow the researcher to obtain information about a topic which may be difficult for one to collect by simply making observations or analyzing quantitative findings. Interviews provide the researcher with an opportunity to ask participants oral questions, allowing the researcher to gain holistic insight on administrator and teacher perceptions of the impact PBIS has on student discipline in the rural alternative school setting (Martella, Nelson, Morgan, & Marchand-Martella, 2013). The interviews between the researcher and participants focused on findings from the first phase of the study to learn more about administrator and teacher perspectives regarding PBIS implementation and the impact PBIS has on student discipline in the rural alternative school.

The instrument selected for interviewing purposes was administrator and teacher interview questions from the SET. Also, questions were used from a previous study conducted on PBIS, and the researcher obtained permission from the author to use these validated interview questions in this study. The school administrator and all certified teachers answered interview questions from the SET as a follow up to quantitative data collected on ODRs. The SET indicates how PBIS is being implemented in this rural alternative school setting, and will also provide further insight on how PBIS implementation is perceived by staff members to determine what impact, if any, PBIS has ODRs. The administrator interview guide consisted of 21 questions, and the interview addresses questions regarding the administrators discipline system, school rules or motto, and the school PBIS team. Seven interview questions are allotted for staff members, and these questions will be used to interview teachers.

Qualitative Data Analysis

For the analysis of qualitative data, interviews were analyzed by using score rubrics associated with the administering of the SET. The SET provides a detailed scoring guide giving descriptions on how interview questions should be scored and analyzed based on feedback received from administrators, teachers, and staff. Todd-Lewis, Palmer, Horner, Sugai, Sampson, and Phillips (2003) provide a handout, available to schools implementing PBIS, which thoroughly explains steps to be followed when scoring interview questions used from the SET. In addition to this, there are completed examples of interview question responses and scores which can be referred to by the researcher indicating how responses should be analyzed.

Responses from each interview session recorded. The recorded interviews were then transcribed and examined in order to determine common themes that emerged from the data. Emerging themes were analyzed to address the qualitative research question associated with this study. This was followed up with a written description of the results.

Personnel

In order to successfully conduct this study, the researcher needed the support of school administrators responsible for allowing researchers permission to conduct studies in the school district. In addition to this, full support of the principal in the alternative school was necessary to obtain data needed for the completion of this study. Any other school personnel responsible for handling student data, as possibly designated by the principal, will contribute to the completion of the data collection process in this study.

Summary of Methods

The methods of this study guided the researcher with critical aspects needed for the collection of quantitative and qualitative data. Methods selected for this study additionally

provided insight on the rural alternative school setting selected for participation in this study, and it details information regarding individuals responsible for the implementation of PBIS in this rural alternative school setting. Participants selected for participation in this study were critical in making the data collection of this study possible. Data obtained served to address each question associated with the study, and also served to test the study's hypothesis.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

Chapter IV of this study consists of two parts and presents quantitative and qualitative data: (1) was to determine what impact, if any, does the implementation of PBIS have on student behavior in a rural alternative school? Question (2) examined administrator and staff perspectives of ODRs and how PBIS implementation has impacted student discipline in this alternative school setting. The explanatory sequential mixed methods research design was implemented in the study and required the researcher to first collect and analyze existing quantitative discipline data. The collection of quantitative data was followed by obtaining administrator and certified teacher feedback through interviews. The quantitative results (part 1 of the study) will be further explained from the use of qualitative interview data (part 2 of the study). Quantitative data was collected using the SWIS database. This is a system used to store all of the participating school districts' ODR data received by students. Descriptive statistical analysis of quantitative data was conducted through ANOVA testing using SPSS version 25. Qualitative data was collected and analyzed from administrator and teacher interview questionnaires providing themes that emerged from the interview data.

Quantitative Research Question and Hypothesis

To determine what impact, if any, the implementation of PBIS had on student behavior in this rural alternative school, the following research question was raised:

Research question #1 – Does the implementation of PBIS, with an emphasis on student behavior; decrease the number of disciplinary referrals received by students in a rural alternative school setting after three years of implementation: To address this question, the hypothesis for this study proposed is as follows:

Ho1: There is no significant difference between the implementation of PBIS, with an emphasis on student behavior, and the number of ODRs received by students in a rural alternative school after three years of PBIS implementation.

Ha1: There is a significant difference between the implementation of PBIS, with an emphasis on behavior, and the numbers of ODRs received by students in a rural alternative school after three years of PBIS implementation.

Quantitative Instrumentation

Prior to collecting data, this study was first approved by the University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB #19x-284). Following IRB approval, the school district selected for participation granted the researcher permission to collect quantitative discipline data pertaining to the rural alternative school, located in North Mississippi. One of the school district behavior specialists provided access to discipline data obtained from the SWIS database. Discipline data reports were generated to show the number of ODRs received by students for 2013-2014 (baseline data), 2014-2015 PBIS year one of implementation, 2015-2016 PBIS year two of implementation, and 2016-2017 year three of implementation. Each of these years represents the independent variable groups in this study, which is PBIS implementation data.

Office disciplinary referral data was provided for each of the aforementioned school terms, indicating the number of ODRs that were received for each term. The behavior specialist indicated that data could be provided, for the alternative school, showing the number of ISS referrals, OSS referrals, and a category of others consisting of referrals students received without being removed from class and these are considered to be minor disciplinary infractions. All three categories of data make up the total number of referrals that have been received by students for each school term in this rural alternative school. Table 1 provides an overview of ODRs received by students in each category with a total number of ODRs in each category for the different school terms.

Table 1

ODRs Received by Students Placed in Alternative School

Term	ISS	OSS	Other	Total
2013-2014	78	69	128	275
2014-2015	191	74	353	618
2015-2016	198	96	594	888
2016-2017	246	125	365	736

Problem behaviors received by students requiring students to be placed in ISS or OSS are considered to be major disciplinary infractions, and based on offense levels coded in the student handbook, these problem behaviors range from level three to level five offences. Problem behaviors placed in the category of other are considered to be minor infractions, and these behaviors do not result in students receiving ISS or OSS as a consequence. Consequences in the other category can be as follows: In school detention (ISD); warnings from the administrator to

the students, parent conferences, writing assignments, and loss of privileges/activities. Table 2 shows a list of problem behaviors (minor disciplinary infractions) students received during each school term representing various infractions that are categorized as other.

Table 2

Minor Problem Behaviors Listed in SWIS

Problem Behaviors
1. Disrespect
2. Disruption
3. Inappropriate Language/Profanity
4. Tardy
5. Skip Class
6. Inappropriate Location
7. Forgery Theft/Plagiarism
8. Technology Violation
9. Lying/Cheating
10. Dress Code Violation
11. Defiance

Although the study does not test the difference between the number of major and minor disciplinary infractions received by students in this rural alternative school setting, it was important for the researcher to indicate problem behaviors which cause students to receive ODRs outside of ISS and OSS. With these infractions being considered minor, and due to the high number of referrals received by students in this area, making up the total number of referrals

received by students, it is imperative to indicate behaviors impacting these numbers.

Statistical Analysis of Quantitative Data

Upon carefully categorizing each group of data found in Table 1, and making observations and notes pertaining to the rural alternative schools' discipline, data was carefully arranged into groups and entered into SPSS 25 to run ANOVA testing. ANOVA testing was conducted in order to determine the significance of this studies hypothesis. The hypothesis tested intended to determine what impact, if any, PBIS has on the number of ODRs received by students in this rural alternative school setting. The alpha level for testing the level of significance remained at the level indicated in SPSS, which is 0.05 in order to test the studies null hypothesis.

Data for the independent variable was labeled as follows: 1 Baseline representing pre-PBIS implementation 2013-2014, 2 Post PBIS 1 representing post-implementation 2014-2015, 3 Post PBIS 2 post-implementation 2015-2016, 4 Post PBIS 3 post-implementation 2016-2017, and the dependent variable data was represented in SPSS by ODRs. The number of ODRs had to be placed in appropriate corresponding categories to test mean data for each group. Each of the following tables, narratives, and figures will represent organized findings obtained from SWIS data provided by the school district participating in this study. Table 3 shows the one-way ANOVA descriptive analysis of data tested within and between each of the four groups' independent variables.

Shown below in Table 3 descriptive data, the baseline data group 2013-2014 and pre-implementation phase of this study, averaged the lowest mean of ODRs ($M=91.67$, $SD = 31.79$, $N = 3$). The baseline data mean was followed by post-PBIS implementation phases. For the 2014-2015, 2 Post-PBIS 1 the mean scores ODRs were ($M = 206$, $SD = 140.10$, $N = 3$). This

was followed by 2015-2016, 3 Post PBIS 2 with a mean ODR descriptive being ($M = 296$, $SD = 263.07$, $N = 3$). Lastly, 2016-2017, 4 Post PBIS 3, mean for ODRs are ($M = 245.33$, $SD = 158.54$, $N = 3$).

Table 3

Oneway ANOVA Descriptive Results

Independent Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1 Baseline	3	91.67	31.79	18.35	12.71	170.63
2 Post PBIS 1	3	206	140.10	80.89	-142.04	554.04
3 Post PBIS 2	3	296	263.07	151.88	-357.49	949.49
4 Post PBIS 3	3	245.33	120.00	69.28	-52.77	543.43
Total	12	209.75	158.54	45.77	109.02	310.48

Oneway ANOVA Descriptive Results Continued

Independent Variables	Minimum	Maximum
1 Baseline	69.00	128.00
2 Post PBIS 1	74.00	353.00
3 Post PBIS 2	96.00	594.00
4 Post PBIS 4	125.00	365.00
Total	69.00	594.00

Figure 2 depicts mean scores from ODRS received by students during each phase of PBIS implementation from one school term to the next. As can be seen from the plots in the figure, the baseline had the lowest average of ODRs received by students. Year two of PBIS

implementations had the highest mean score average.

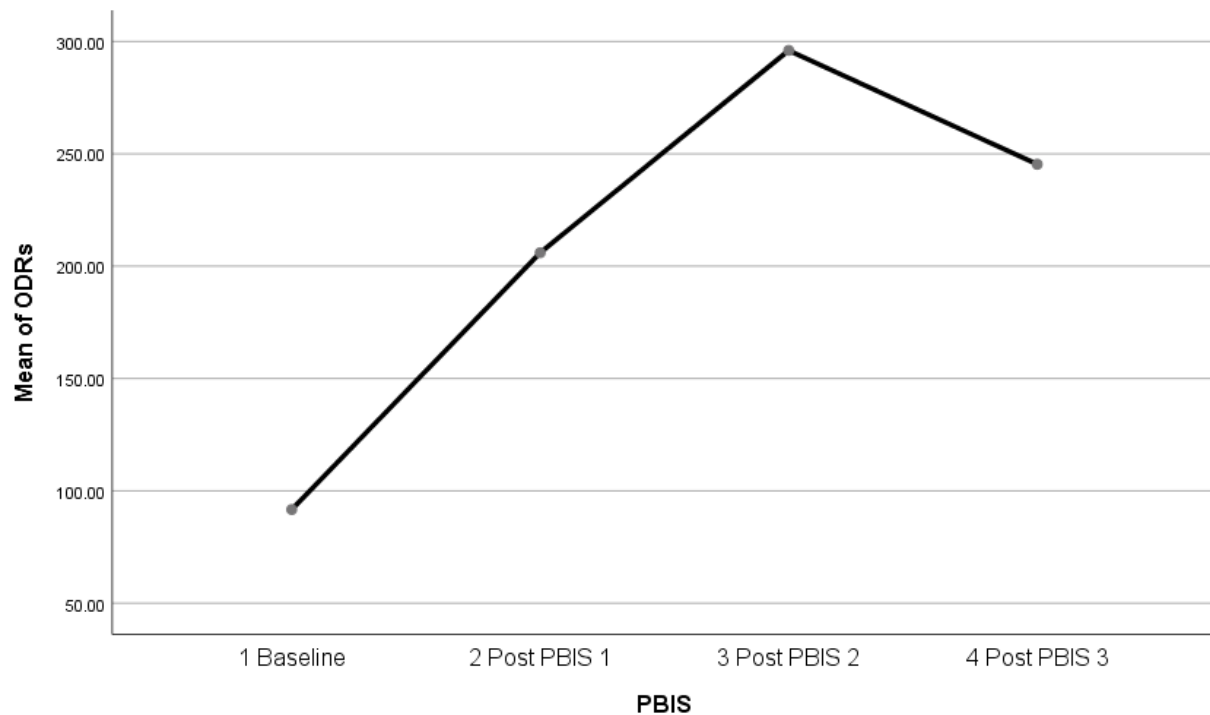


Figure 2. Mean Plots from ODRs during each Phase of PBIS Implementation

After analyzing the group descriptive, the assumption of normality was evaluated by testing the homogeneity of variances and was found tenable according to the Levene's Test statistic results. The variances in the scores among the four groups tested were not violated because the significance (Sig.) is greater than .086 which is greater than .05. Table 4 indicates existing values among the four PBIS groups based on the mean.

Table 4

Test of Homogeneity of Variances

ODR Mean/Median	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Based on Mean	3.16	3	8	.086
Based on Median	.791	3	8	.532
Based on Mean and with adjusted df	.791	3	3.23	.570
Based on trimmed mean	2.92	3	8	.100

The next step of hypothesis testing was to assess the significance level of ANOVA testing. If the *p* value is less than or equal to .05 this indicates that there is a significant difference among the means. However, if the *p* value is greater than .05 then there is no significant difference among the means indicating there is not significant evidence to fail to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is no significant difference among any of the means associated with the four PBIS groups in this study. Table 5 shows significance level of .496 which is greater than .05; therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. There is no significant difference between the implementation of PBIS, and the number of ODRs received by students in this rural alternative school after three years of PBIS implementation.

Table 5

ANOVA Test of Between Subject Effects

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	67988.92	3	22662.97	.870	.496
Within Groups	208487.33	8	26060.92		
Total	276476.25	11			

Quantitative Question #1

Research question #1 in this study asks: Does the implementation of PBIS, with an emphasis on student behavior, decrease the number of disciplinary referrals received by students in a rural alternative school setting after three years of PBIS implementation. Hypothesis testing indicates that after three years of implementing PBIS, in the alternative school studied, there is no statistical significant difference existing among the means of the groups tested in this study. Therefore; PBIS implementation does not decrease the number of referrals students receive in this setting at a level significant enough to make a difference in means compared after three years of implementing PBIS.

Qualitative Results and Instrumentation

The second part of this study required the researcher to collect qualitative data as a follow up to the quantitative component of this study. Qualitative interviews were necessary to gain a better understanding of the PBIS implementation in a rural alternative school setting from the perspectives of the school administrator and certified teachers in this academic setting.

Qualitative results for this study were collected from personal interviews conducted between the researcher and interviewees. There was a total of five subjects interviewed ($N = 5$) to obtain and explore common themes associated with perceptions of PBIS implementation in this rural alternative school setting. One administrator and four certified teachers out five eligible subjects elected to participate in this study. There is only one building level administrator assigned to this school.

The analyzations of these interviews were interpreted using interview scoring criteria from the SET version 2.1. Additional interview questions, asked of the administrator and certified teachers were analyzed through the emergence of themes. The additional interview questions were followed up with a researcher response explaining how the question and answers contributed to the study findings.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data collected for this study required the researcher to record administrator and teacher interviews for proper analyzation. According to Creswell (2014) interview data can be properly analyzed once recorded by carefully transcribing and repeatedly reviewing the interview data. Once data has been carefully transcribed and reviewed for accuracy the researcher is able to categorize and code the data for the development of themes. Interview data for the current study was transcribed and reviewed thoroughly for analysis by typing out interview responses and going back to review recorded data to ensure interviews were transcribed verbatim. Interview data was organized and notes were used to categorized patterns and themes which emerged from the perspectives of the administrator and certified teachers. Adhering to these steps was necessary to ensure the accuracy in reporting themes developed from interview data.

Administrator Feedback on PBIS Implementation

The principal of the alternative school studied ($N = 1$) participated in an interview and responded to a total of twenty-seven interview questions. Twenty-one of the questions were obtained from the SET version 2.1 administrator interview guide. Questions from the SET were used to discuss the schools discipline system, the school rules or motto, and to determine from the administrator's perspective how the school's PBIS team addresses school-wide discipline. Interview questions twenty-two through twenty-seven were adopted from a previous study conducted on the implementation of PBIS in another academic setting. The researcher obtained written permission from the author (Appendix D) to use these questions in this study.

Administrator Question #1: *“Do you collect and summarize office discipline referral information?”*

Response: “Yes I do.”

SET Scoring Criteria:

As a result of the administrator answering “yes” to question #1, the interview is able to continue to the next question. According to Todd, Lewis-Palmer, Horner, Sugai, Sampson, and Philips (2011), the principal started the interview off indicating that a discipline system is in place, and there is no need to skip to question four.

Administrator Question #2: *“What system do you use for collecting and summarizing office discipline referrals?”*

Response: “We use, SWIS. Through SWIS you can see every referral recorded regarding discipline data for our school. I also keep up with my own system of tracking my students with a filing system in order to monitor the behavior of all students who entered the school.”

- a) *“What data do you collect”* Response: “We collect the number of referrals received by students, when, where, and how students are receiving those. The number of referrals that are being written by teachers, and how often students with disabilities are receiving those referrals versus those who do not have an IEP.”
- b) *“Who Collects and enters the data?”* Response: “Once I receive referrals on students, the secretary is responsible for entering all discipline data for the alternative school.”

SET Scoring Criteria:

This interview question coincides with feature (E2) in the SET scoring document. This question is designed to evaluate the monitoring and decision-making process associated with the implementation of PBIS in the rural alternative school setting. The score range for this question, and all other questions scored according to SET scoring guidelines, was as follows: 0 = no; 1 = referrals are collected; 2 = yes. Because the administrator was able to clearly define a system for collecting and summarizing discipline referrals and the software used for the collection of discipline data; the score received in this area was a 2.

Administrator Question #3: *“What do you do with the office discipline referral information?”* (E3)

Response: “We enter all of the discipline data into SWIS.”

- a) *“Who looks at the data?”*

Response: “District administrators, teachers when necessary, counselors, and we have behavior specialists who are responsible for looking at all discipline data throughout the school district. They are responsible for monitoring students for tier tracking to see if these students are on tier two or three, and in order to determine proper interventions that these students need. This data is used before students are placed in the alternative school.

Some students can also begin the tier process after they are placed in the alternative school depending on how their behavior is once they receive placement.”

b) *“How often do you share it with other staff?”*

Response: “We have weekly meetings on Tuesday. Therefore, I share my discipline data weekly. Also daily, but it depends because if I have a student that is receiving a lot of referrals and they were not before then I need to look at this. Especially if all of these referrals are coming from one teacher, because I need to know if there is a true behavior issue with the student or if there is just an issue with the teacher. Because if a student is receiving a referral from one teacher everyday than there is something wrong. Therefore, I have to really look at this. I look at the discipline data to determine if there are too many referrals taking place in the morning time when students are in the cafeteria, or after lunch, etc., in order to decide if this is an issue that we need to address as a school because if there are too many. When have certain issues that start occurring in high numbers or certain areas, I have to take a step back and reflect, along with my staff, on how we can plan to do things differently in order to prevent disciplinary issues from occurring.”

SET Scoring Criteria:

After evaluating the administrator’s response to this question, and referring back to the SET scoring guide, the administrator has indicated that the team does provide discipline data summary reports on a weekly basis. Because this is done more than two-three times per year, a score of 2 was received in this component of the SET (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd & Horner, 2001).

Administrator Question #4: *“What type of problems do you expect teachers to refer the office rather than handling in the classroom/ specific setting?” (D2)*

Response: “What I try to train my teachers to do is to keep a parent contact log where they call parents for small issues, such as “Johnny” being off task today, and I had to redirect him several times. Or, Johnny sort of talked back to me today, and I just gave him a warning today. This system is in place for teachers to be able to show proper documentation on how they have provided proper interventions inside the classroom prior to just writing students up. My goal as an administrator is to train teachers on how to handle certain disciplinary issues in the classroom. However, this is the alternative school so you won’t always have students who exhibit perfect behaviors. Certain issues from our students are expected to occur, but there needs to be a system in place. I also expect for teachers to be on task and working/teaching from bell to bell to alleviate from having so many referrals in the classroom. With that in mind, in the real world there are going to be certain major issues that will occur that will cause teachers to have to write referrals, such as students fighting and having altercations with other students, total disrespect towards teachers such as using profanity, or coming to the teacher in a threatening way and making the teacher feel threatened or unsafe. This is not allowed at all. Walking out of a classroom can be major, depending on why they are walking out. The students have the right to have an exit, because if they feel so upset to the point where they might hurt someone or they feel threatened, I want them to come out of the room. However, the teacher knows to give the referral and let the office know that they are out of the room and no longer under their supervision. When students choose this route as an exit they have to know that they are not in the wrong when they receive the

referral, so once I speak to the child and investigate the situation I will know how to address the referral as well as process it. So these are things that I have set in place and that I continue to train teachers on. My job as an administrator is to be seen inside of the classroom and up and down the hallways so that my staff knows that I am not only there to serve them and the students but to also protect them as well.”

SET Scoring Criteria:

Based on the administrator’s response to this question, behaviors that are considered to be major should be referred to the office. Major referrals, as described by the principal in this interview can be things such as aggression towards teachers or others, or anything that jeopardizes the safety of others, fighting, the use of profanity, and total disrespect or defiance toward the teacher in a manner that is out of control should be referred to the office. Before this can be scored teachers must be interviewed to determine if their views on this question are aligned with administration (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd & Horner, 2001).

Administrator Question #5: *“What is the procedure for handling extreme emergencies in the building (i.e. stranger with a gun)? (D4)*

Response: “Well hopefully that will never occur. The district has a safety plan, and we have certain drills that we are supposed to follow monthly or quarterly throughout the year. As an administrator I have to document to make sure that I have trained teachers on all evacuation procedures and drills for lockdowns and intruders. For each one there are certain codes that we use or say over the intercom to let teachers know what safety procedures they need to take if something is to occur. An intruder coming into the building with a gun we have things set in stone such as all doors being locked through the

day, a buzzer with a camera outside of the doors and only secretary is allowed to let those outside of the building in. She can only let them in once they have identified themselves to the office and she knows who they are. If it is someone that she cannot properly identify or recognize or feel comfortable with letting in, she is to notify me as the administrator not the security guard, and I will go to the door and question the person without opening the door. All of the glasses on the doors are bulletproof. In the event that the person does get inside the building and we didn't realize that they had a gun on them, there is a metal detector that all visitors and students have to walk through. They walk through, and they are searched by the security guard on duty. If someone comes in with a gun, such as people that we do know or other workers it could happen, but still there are procedures to follow by staff and students in the event that this does happen, and lockdown drills have been practiced several times over the course of the school year."

SET Scoring Criteria:

There are four evaluation questions in the category which addresses the school-wide system for responding to behavioral violations. Item D4 addresses the above question, and the administrator has indicated that this alternative school setting has a lockdown procedure in place. In order to score this item for the set, ninety to one-hundred percent of the interviewees must agree with the administration on the procedures for handling extreme emergencies (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd & Horner, 2001).

Administrator Question #6: *"Do you have school rules or a motto?"*

Response: "Yes, we have school rules that are setup according PBIS."

SET Scoring Criteria:

The administrator's response to this question was "Yes"; therefore; the next

question in the interview can be answered without having the interviewee skip to question #9.

Administrator Question#7: *“How many are there?”*

Response: “5 rules and you can see them displayed throughout the classrooms, along with expectations for the hallways, classrooms, restrooms, and cafeteria or common areas.”

SET Scoring Criteria:

Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd & Horner (2011) indicate in the scoring guide, that there has to be evidence in the school. There is evidence of five rules posted in each of the classrooms in this rural alternative school setting. However, Todd, Lewis-Palmer, Horner, Sugai, Sampson, and Phillips (2012) show examples of how rules should be positively stated. All rules included in the five rules for the school failed to meet these criteria. Therefore, a score of 1 was given to address feature (A2) on the scoring guide.

Administrator Question #8: *“What are the rules/motto?” (B4, B5)*

Response: “My motto is that: We are to provide a safe haven for students.”

SET Scoring Criteria:

Question #8 addresses features indicating how behavioral expectations are taught. In order to properly address this feature of the evaluation, both students (B4) and staff must be able to respond to these items. Because the researcher did not obtain IRB approval to survey students a score of 0 had to be given in response to item (B4). The administrator is able to cite/list 67% of the school rules; however, question (B5) will be scored only after teachers have been interviewed (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd & Horner, 2001).

Administrator Question#9: *“What are they called? (B4, B5)*

Response: “Charger Traits”

SET Scoring Criteria:

The response for this item can be referred back to the information explained above. Final scores for each of these items will be calculated once teachers have been interviewed for the study.

Administrator Question#10: *“Do you acknowledge students for doing well socially?”*

Response: “Yes”

SET Scoring Criteria:

Feedback from the administrator indicates that students are acknowledged for doing well socially. A response of yes to this question allowed the researcher to move on to the next question in the study.

Administrator Question #11: *“What are the Social acknowledgements/ activities/ routines called (student of the month, positive referral, letter home, stickers, high 5's)? (C2, C3)*

Response: “We have student of the month, Most Improved Student award at the end of the year due to significant growth in behavior, positive phone calls to parents. We also nominate students for the Perseverance Award through the Chamber of Commerce.”

SET Scoring Criteria:

Feature items C2 and C3 involve the evaluation of the on-going system for rewarding behavioral expectations. The SET contains two items in which students should be interviewed by answering two questions, and this is where the second item for students is addressed. However, as previously indicated IRB approval was not granted to

interview students. Therefore, item C2 received a score of 0 in this area. Item C3 will be scored once teachers have been interviewed in order to determine if 90% or more of the staff indicated they have delivered a reward besides giving students verbal praise for behaviors which are expected over the past two months (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd & Horner, 2001).

Administrator Question #12: *“Has the team taught/reviewed the school-wide program with staff this year?” (B3)*

Response: “Yes”

SET Scoring Criteria:

Since the interview response to this item was “Yes”, the next interview question was asked and answered without having to skip to item 18.

Administrator Question #13: *“Is your school-wide team representative of your school staff?” (F3)*

Response: “Yes everyone is a part of the team.”

SET Scoring Criteria:

The above question is an administrator only interview question in the SET. This question falls into the feature items for management, and the question is in response to evaluation question (F3). Because the administrator has reported that team membership includes representation of all staff, a score of 2 is received. Only a score of 0 or 2 can be granted in response to this question (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd & Horner, 2001).

Administrator Question #14: *“Are you on the team?”*

Response: “Yes.”

SET Scoring Criteria:

Based on interview feedback, the administrator is an active member of the school-wide behavior support team; therefore, a score of 2 was granted for item (F5) (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd & Horner, 2001).

Administrator Question #15: *“How often does the team meet?” (F6)*

Response: “Once a week on Tuesday.”

SET Scoring Criteria:

Since the administrator reports that the school-wide team meets at least once a month, and on a weekly basis, Item (F6) received a score of 2 in this category of management for PBIS (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd & Horner, 2001).

Administrator Question #16: *“Do you attend team meetings consistently?” (F5)*

Response: “Yes.”

SET Scoring Criteria:

This item has already been previously scored based on administrator feedback indicating that the principal plays an active/consistent role as a member of the school-wide team.

Administrator Question #17: *“Who is your team leader/facilitator?” (F4)*

Response: “I co-team with another teacher who has an administrative degree. She is allowed to lead team meetings on discipline and academics.”

SET Scoring Criteria

A team leader was named by the administrator for item (F4) in the interview. However, this item cannot be scored until other teachers, who are interviewed, indicate they are able to name the team leader for the school-wide team.

Administrator Question #18: *“Does the team provide updates to faculty on activities & data summaries? (E3, F7) If yes, how often?”*

Response: “Yes, Once a week on Tuesdays.”

SET Scoring Criteria:

Question #18 addresses two scoring items on the SET. Item (E3) features the monitoring and decision-making process of school-wide PBIS. According to administrator feedback, from the interview, the team does provide discipline data summary reports to the staff at least three times/year. The administrative response to this item allowed a score of 2.

In addition to this, question #18 goes on the category of management and also responds to item (F7). Because the administrator reported that the team reports progress to the staff at least four times per year a score of 2 was also allowed for this response item (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd & Horner, 2001).

Administrator Question#19: *“Do you have an out-of-school liaison in the state or district to support you on positive behavior support systems development?” “If yes, who?” (G2)*

Response: “Yes, we have life-help to assist with discipline but not PBIS. We have behavior specialists who assist with PBIS and the use of SWIS, but they are not an outside agency who assist with PBIS.”

SET Scoring Criteria:

Administrator Question #20: *“What are your top 3 school improvement goals?” (F1)*

Response: “First is to have a safe and clean environment; next, address behaviors and teach students how they can behave differently by using PBIS and coming up with better

ways to address discipline. Lastly would be academics because once their behaviors are addressed and made better than their academics will improve. Academics are very important but because of this population of students it is important to first get the students behaviors in line in order to grow and excel academically.”

SET Scoring Criteria:

Question #20 also deals with how the administrator manages the school-wide plan for addressing discipline according to PBIS. This question addresses item (F1) on the SET scoring guide. Based on administrator feedback, the second goal, in the school improvement plan, indicates the need to improve behavior support systems in the school. This is one of the schools top three school improvement plan goals and considered to be a priority. Therefore, a score of 2 was given in response to this item on the SET (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd & Horner, 2001).

Administrator Question #21: *“Does the school budget contain an allocated amount of money for building and maintaining school-wide behavioral support?” (G1)*

Response: “Yes”

SET Scoring Criteria:

According to the response given by the administrator, there is a budget allocated for the school to maintain school-wide behavioral support. Therefore, item (G1) received a score of 2 based on the response of “yes” to this question.

Additional Administrator Questions, Responses, and Themes

Administrator Question #22: *“Please describe the major changes that have occurred in this alternative setting as a result of the implementation of PBIS.”*

Response: “Handbooks were changed and revised in order to be consistent with

the PBIS guidelines. With change, there has been a notice of more referrals because change brings about defiance and more referrals. This is what happened with the start of PBIS at the alternative school.”

Researcher’s comments to question #22:

The administrator’s response to this question allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of the administrator's perspective on why there was an increase in referrals when compared to baseline ODR data on the implementation of PBIS.

According to this response, a change in how discipline is addressed can bring about more disciplinary issues. The administrator feels this is the reason for the spike in referrals in the alternative school.

Administrator Question #23: *“As part of the implementation of PBIS, describe the greatest successes that have resulted.”*

Response: “Since I have been there, with PBIS, and even though my data may show that I have more referrals to see the students motivated by the snacks and incentives that we have in place and the things that they look forward to such as student of the month it lets me know that something we are doing with PBIS is working. I feel that students trust me and the staff because of how we motivate them with the use of incentives that go along with PBIS. I can see from the students that they know what's expected of them and that they want to be rewarded for their good behavior. I also use attendance to motivate them.”

Researcher’s comments to question #23:

Feedback from this question allowed the researcher to explore ways in which the administrator feels PBIS has been successful in the rural alternative school studied.

Results from this question indicate that the administrator feels that students are motivated by the incentives that are in place. In addition to this, the administrator feels that students know and understand what is expected of them, in regard to exhibiting appropriate behaviors, because they aim to receive rewards.

Administrator Question #24: *“What challenges have existed with the implementation of PBIS?”*

Response: “Inconsistencies in how teachers address discipline, what one teacher is willing to accept another one might not. There are situations in which teachers might be “pen happy”. Sometimes I have to support the teachers in regard to what they are writing students up for. I have to respect some of those. However, the teachers’ personalities can play a huge role in how students are referred to the office. There could be personality issues between the teacher and the student, and this can cause inconsistencies. If I see things that are unfair in how teachers address the students, I call the teachers in and address the problem. I have to make a decision, and decide if I will or will not process referrals received by students from teachers who have been unfair in how the students were referred to the office.”

Researcher’s comments to question #24:

The administrator’s perspective on this question explains some of the challenges that have been observed since PBIS have been implemented in this setting. These challenges provide insight, from an administrative standpoint, on why there could also be high numbers of referrals written up on students. According to the administrator, there could be inconsistencies in how teachers punish students. Additionally, there can be personality issues between teachers and students which can also be a factor in why there

are high numbers of referrals when compared to baseline data after three years of implementation.

Administrator Question #25: *“Share your thoughts on what impact PBIS has had for students both with disabilities and no disabilities in regard to behavior and academics.”*

Response: “In my answer I cannot show the division. However, students with disabilities or an IEP cannot always receive the same punishment as students who do not have an IEP. I have to find an alternative to address disciplinary issues of students with disabilities because their IEP has to be followed. They may receive time out as opposed to ISD for the same offence. I cannot render the same consequences for those students due to having to consider the disability and the IEP.” “As for academics, I feel that the grades of students’ placed in the alternative school have improved for both students with disabilities and students who do not have an IEP. The grading policy was changed in the student handbook, when the handbook was revised to follow guidelines for PBIS implementation. Students have to maintain a 65 or above average in all subject areas once they enter the alternative school, and I monitor grades weekly from a students’ time of entry. Special considerations can be made for students who did not have a 65 average prior to enrollment in the alternative school, but I have to gather information regarding students and their grades once they are placed in order to make decisions.

Researcher’s comments to question #25:

Information obtained from this question allowed the researcher to examine the impact the administrator feels PBIS is having on behavior and academics in this rural alternative school setting. In regard to behavior, alternative disciplinary approaches can be made for students with disabilities, because it is important to make sure that all IEPs

are being followed. This can impact ODR data when considering how ODRs are written and processed depending on whether or not a student has an IEP.

As for academics, according to the administrator, the students are required to have and maintain at least a 65 average once they are placed in the alternative school. As a result of this, the administrator feels that grades have improved since PBIS was implemented in this alternative school. Overall, the administrator feels that PBIS implementation has improved academics in this alternative school setting. However, the interviewee's response indicates that referrals for students with disabilities must be approached differently from those students who do not have an IEP. The administrator must be able to show that IEPs are being followed at all times even when processing referrals.

Administrator Question #26: *“What behavioral and academic interventions have been implemented and what results have you experienced?”*

Response: “For behavior interventions I follow behavior plans that are in place for students. I also follow and document steps according to the handbook to assist students with their behaviors. I also make sure that the staff is doing check in check out on all students daily to ensure that behavior is being properly monitored and supervised by all staff. Academic interventions: Students have to be worked with one-on-one. Work should not be sent back to the host schools without teachers checking over the students work to make sure that students have put forth their best efforts to complete assignments. Students should work in small groups, one-on-one, and allow inclusion teachers to work with other students in addition to their special needs students to receive interventions on assignments. Students should receive peer tutoring when needed to assist material that

students do not understand. They also must make sure that students are on task at all times and understand what they are doing at all times. As a result of students receiving interventions, I have noticed that students have done better academically, and for the most part students are normally observed working and on task.”

Researcher’s comments to question #26:

Question #26 provides the researcher with further insight, from the administrator’s standpoint, on interventions that are in place for student in this rural alternative school setting regarding both behavior and academics. Themes from this question indicate that students in the alternative school have behavior intervention plans in place for students, and that all students are on check-in-check out. As for academics, the interviewee indicates that students receive a lot of one-on-one instruction from teachers, they work in small groups, students receive peer tutoring, and the academic process is carefully monitored to ensure that students are constantly on task and redirected to remain on task and focused. The administrator feels students are doing better academically as a result of interventions in place because of PBIS.

Administrator Question #27: *“Are there things not included in this interview that you feel are important to the implementation of PBIS in this rural alternative school setting?”*

Response: “The validity of the implementation might be questionable from all schools due to how PBIS is valued by all responsible for implementing this framework in an alternative school setting. There needs to be more professional development, and a consistency in how this is implemented across the board in order for it to effectively work in all settings. I am sure that other interventions along with PBIS are possibly needed and could also bring about better results in an alternative school setting in regard to the

number of office referrals that students receive in an alternative school setting. So, there needs to be more consistency across the board in how PBIS is addressed.”

Researcher’s comments to question#27:

The administrator expressed that the validity of PBIS could be questionable due to the values and of those responsible for implementation, more professional development is needed in order for PBIS to be more-so successful throughout the entire school district, further interventions, and other disciplinary approaches along with PBIS are possibly needed in order to lower ODRs in this setting.

Certified Teacher Feedback on PBIS Implementation

Certified teachers from the alternative school studied ($N = 4$) participated in the interview and responded to a total of twelve interview questions. Questions one through seven came from the SET version 2.1 teacher interview guide. Each of these items will be scored following the scoring guidelines for the SET, and as a follow-up to the administrator interview, where some of these questions can only be scored after both the teacher and administrator have been interviewed. The additional teacher interview questions derived from a previous study on PBIS where permission was granted to use these questions to interview teachers (Appendix D).

Teacher Question #1: “What are the _____ (school rules, high 5's, 3 bee's)?”

(B5) (Define what the acronym means)

Interviewees Responses: All four teachers interviewed were able to define the 3bee’s associated with expectations which are: Be Respectful, Be Responsible, and Be Safe. In addition to this, the teachers are all aware of 5 school-wide classroom rules that are posted in each of the classrooms in the rural alternative school, and some teachers indicated that they were also able to state the classroom rules as well.

SET Scoring Criteria:

SET scoring criteria for this question indicate that 100% of the teachers interviewed can list, for the interview, or state at least 67% of the rules. Based on scoring criteria for item (B5), and according to teacher responses score of 2 was received for this question (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd & Horner, 2001).

Teacher Question #2: *“Have you taught the school rules/behavioral expectations this year?” (B2)*

Interviewee responses: All four of the interviewees responded, “Yes.”

SET Scoring Criteria:

Question #2 addresses feature items which address behavioral expectations taught in conjunction with PBIS implementation. Based on feedback from teacher interviews, 100% of them state that teaching of behavioral expectations to students has occurred this year. Therefore a score of 2 was received for this question (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd & Horner, 2001).

Teacher Question #3: *“Have you given out any _____ since _____?” (C3) (rewards for appropriate behavior) (2 months ago)*

Interviewee Responses: Each teacher indicated that they reward students for appropriate behavior. All teachers indicated in their interview that they do so on a weekly basis.

SET Scoring Criteria:

Based on teacher responses to question # 3, 100% of them indicate they have delivered a reward (other than verbal praise) to students for expected behavior over the past two months. Scoring criteria for this question indicates that item (C3) receive a score of 2 because over 90% of the teachers reward students weekly.

Teacher Question#4: *“What types of student problems do you or would you refer to the office? (D2)*

Interviewee Responses: Problems that teachers described they would refer to the office is as follows: excessive or repetitive disruptions in class, excessive talking, extreme disrespect in a threatening manner, fights, excessive use of profanity, total defiance toward teachers or administrators.

SET Scoring Criteria:

After interviewing the school administrator, followed by certified teachers, 100% of the teachers indicate that they agree with the administrator on what problems are office-managed and what problems are classroom-managed. The score received for item (D2) is a 2 based on scoring criteria for the SET (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd & Horner, 2001).

Teacher Question #5: *“What is the procedure for dealing with a stranger with a gun?” (D4)*

Interviewee Responses: All teachers were aware of the schools lock-down procedures, and codes that are stated over the intercom system if there is a person in the building considered to be an intruder and may have a gun.

SET Scoring Criteria:

100% of the staff asked agrees with administration on the procedures for handling extreme emergencies on item (D4). Responses to this item indicate that lockdown procedures are in place to address (stranger in the building with a weapon) (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd & Horner, 2001). Because 90% or more of the teachers agree with the administration on this item the score for this item is 2.

Teacher Question #6: *“Is there a school-wide team that addresses behavioral support in your building?”*

Interviewee Responses: All teachers interviewed indicate that there is a school-wide team that addresses discipline in the building.

SET Scoring Criteria:

100% of the teachers interviewed indicate that the school has a school-wide team that addresses discipline. This question was scored in the SET based on the feedback obtained from the administrator prior to the collection of teacher interview data.

Teacher Question #7: *“Are you on the team?”*

Interviewee Responses: All teachers indicate that they are on the school-wide team.

SET Scoring Criteria:

100% of the teachers indicated that they are a part of the school-wide team.

Additional Certified Teacher Interview Questions and Themes

Teacher Question #8: *“Describe the common Language that is in place and used by all staff settings to define and work with all students.”*

Interviewee Responses: Themes that emerged from each of the teacher interviews are as follows: Being able to maintain a positive demeanor and tone with the students, addressing students in non-provoking manners, being direct when speaking to students but in a positive way, showing respect when speaking to students in order to model this behavior for students, being uplifting and encouraging at all times, and use language that shows teachers have high expectations for students.

Researcher's comments to question #8:

Each of the interviewee responses to this question provide insight on how the teachers feel students should be addressed in this alternative school setting. The common language described by all participants indicates the importance of modeling positive and respectful language and tones when addressing all students.

Teacher Question #9: *“What are the Behavioral Expectations at this rural alternative school?”*

Interviewee Responses: 100% of the teachers interviewed indicated in their responses that students are expected to follow school-wide expectations for the classroom, hallways, restrooms, and the cafeteria. To elaborate on some of the responses one interviewee indicated that in addition to following expectations throughout the school, students are expected to show improvements in the behaviors daily to show that they are doing better than they were behavior wise prior to receiving placement.

Researcher's comments to question #9:

Teacher feedback from question #9 indicates that 100% of the teachers interviewed are aware of the school's expectations for students in different locations throughout the school. Responses indicate that teachers are aware of expectations associated with the implementation of PBIS.

Teacher Question #10: *“Do you feel that the staff receives regular feedback on student behavior patterns?” Please explain.*

Interviewee Responses: All of the staff members interviewed feel that weekly meetings take place on Tuesday. Several concerns regarding the ways in which feedback is given and received in these weekly meetings were expressed in the responses. One-

hundred percent of the teachers interviewed feel that behavior discussions regarding discipline should be in depth regarding the behavior of students and discipline. Teachers indicate that although behavior is reviewed in our meetings, there needs to be more professional development in this area. Themes that emerged from this question are as follows: Although we address discipline in our weekly meetings more about behavior and behavior patterns is discussed in individual student exit meetings; so “I feel that it is not enough and we need more detailed discussions regarding all students on behavior data.” More interventions regarding discipline needs to be discussed besides check-in-check-out and behavior intervention plans.

Researcher’s comments to question #10:

Interview responses provide further insight on why ODR data indicates increased referrals after the collection of baseline data. 100% of the teachers interviewed express that although weekly school-wide meetings occur, where the behavior of students and discipline are discussed, there needs to be more detailed meetings focused on student behavior and discipline in this alternative school setting. This question sheds light on findings obtained from hypothesis testing in this study.

Teacher Question #11: *“As a staff member how do you perceive the implementation of PBIS?”*

Interviewee Responses: Staff members interviewed expressed mixed feelings regarding the implementation of PBIS in an alternative school setting. Responses to this question were as follows. “PBIS is not working as it should because I feel that PBIS is not an appropriate approach for addressing student discipline in an alternative school setting. PBIS is not a bad thing, but our students need more.” Response two states,

“PBIS would work better for us if all of our staff placed more focus on PBIS and interventions or ways to further address disciplinary issues. PBIS is a good thing, but we need to work on making it better.” Response three states, “I feel that PBIS works, but we need to add more to it, and I think that we should find another way to address minor disciplinary infractions because the minor issues make our ODRs higher than what they should be.” Response four states, “ PBIS will work well in the alternative school if we did other things in conjunction with this, because students already enter our school on tiers two and three so these students need further interventions outside of PBIS.”

Researcher’s comments to question #11:

Seventy-five percent of those that responded to this question feel that PBIS does work in the alternative school setting, but more is needed in regard to interventions to make this framework better. The remaining 25% of responses to this item feels that PBIS does not work in the alternative school at all, due to the incentives students receive and they are already on tier two and three regarding behavior. Feedback from this question indicates the need to examine other proactive frameworks that could be implemented in the alternative school to address behavior deficits.

Teacher Question #12: *“What role does PBIS play in the lives of students that helps them want to succeed?”*

Interviewee Responses: Teacher responses to question #12 explain mixed-emotions about the role PBIS plays in the lives of students. One response states, “For some of our students PBIS is not enough to motivate them. Interventions have to be altered in order to truly help our students.” Another interviewee stated, “PBIS works for the students and it motivates the students and also allows them to work towards achieving their behavior

goals.” The next teacher interview stated, “PBIS does not work for our students, and it causes issues with students wanting to transition back to their host schools due to them being incentivized too much. The last respondent stated, “PBIS works because the student incentives motivate the students to do better.”

Researcher’s comments to question #12:

Teacher interview question #12 allowed the researcher to gain broader insight on how teachers feel that PBIS helps students want to achieve. Responses to this question, for teachers interviewed in this rural alternative school setting, indicate that PBIS does not do a sufficient job of helping students in alternative schools succeed. Fifty percent of the responses indicate that PBIS works in regard to motivating students and helping them. Another 25% of the responses indicates that PBIS will help some students experience success, but not all of them. The remaining 25% of the interview responses indicates that PBIS does nothing to help students in this alternative school setting wish to become successful due to factors associated with rewarding students.

Interview Analysis

All scores calculated from the administrator and certified teacher responses were placed into the SET scoring guide. These scores were calculated to determine summary scores from product reviews, administrator and teacher interviews, and observations and calculated according to the SET scoring guidelines. SET scores for each of the seven feature areas included in the SET were added up to get a total for each area and obtain a mean score. The total mean score from each of the feature items and divided by seven to obtain a complete SET score. Any total score below 80% indicates that PBIS is not being fully implemented with fidelity. The feature areas are as follows: A- Expectations Defined; B- Behavioral Expectations Taught; C- On-going

System for Rewarding Behavioral Expectations; D- System for Responding to Behavioral Expectations; E- Monitoring & Decision-Making; F- Management; and G- District-Level Support. Table 6 shows calculated summary scores from the SET, conducted by the researcher, for the purposes of this study. The SET conducted for this rural alternative school indicates a score of 70%, which indicates that the school is not fully implementing PBIS with fidelity (Todd, Lewis-Palmer, Horner, Sugai, Sampson, & Phillips, 2012).

Table 6

School-wide Evaluation Tool Version 2.1 Summary Scores (SET)

Feature	Summary Score	Mean
A. Expectations Defined	2/4	50
B. Behavioral Expectations Taught	8/10	80
C. On-going System for Rewarding Behavioral Expectations	3/6	50
D. System for Responding to Behavioral Violations	8/8	100
E. Monitoring and Decision-Making	7/8	88
F. Management	12/16	75
G. District-Level Support	2/4	50
Total		493/7 = 70%

Note. Reproduced from SET Scoring Document

Research Question 2 Analysis

After analyzing interview responses from questions obtained from the SET, the researcher categorized interview questions from the administrator and teachers looking for common themes that emerged from additional questions asked in this study. Question #2 asks

“What are the administrative and staff perceptions of PBIS in the rural AEP, as it relates to student behavior and discipline post PBIS implementation?” Listed below are the following five common themes emerging from the school administrator and teachers in response to this question:

Positive Common Language

One-hundred percent of the teachers interviewed indicated that as a result of PBIS, students in this alternative school setting are addressed using positive tones, attitudes, and demeanors. All of the teachers indicate that this is what is expected of them in regard to common language that is used to address students. Feedback from one teacher states, “The common language would be for everyone to speak directly, positively, and respectfully to students.” Another student stated, “at all times we must use positive language and we must be uplifting and encouraging.”

PBIS Motivates students with Incentives

Among the five individuals interviewed, three out of five interviewees indicate that students are motivated by PBIS, and they also feel the incentives students receive play a role in why some students are motivated by PBIS. As previously stated by the administrator, “Since I have been there, with PBIS, and even though my data may not show that I have more referrals, to see the students motivated by the snacks and incentives that we have in place, and the things that they look forward to such as student of the month it lets me know that something we are doing with PBIS is working.

In addition to the administrator indicating motivation for students, two of the teacher interview responses also indicate that students are motivated by PBIS. One teacher stated “PBIS for some students helps to motivate them to achieve what they want to achieve, and to continue

to work and strive to keep up with their grades and assignments.” Another teacher stated “I really believe that the incentives that go along with PBIS works and helps them a lot. The incentives to me are what help our students with their behaviors because they work for it and they enjoy it.”

Understand Expectations

One-hundred percent of the interviewees indicated that students are aware of expectations. In addition to having classroom expectations, there are expectations for common areas as well. While students are in designated areas they understand school-wide and classroom expectations for behavior and academics. The principal states, “I can see from the students that they know what’s expected of them and that they want to be reward for their good behavior.” As stated by one of the teachers, “Students are expected to complete their work with nothing less than 65% accuracy, and we have hallway, cafeteria, bathroom, and classroom expectations that are posted in all areas.”

Feedback and PBIS

One-hundred percent of the staff interviewed acknowledges participation in weekly meetings that are held on Tuesdays as a result of district-wide policy, which also plays a role in PBIS discussions and implementation. Although these meetings are acknowledged by all, 80% of those interviewed feel that students are positively impacted by PBIS implementation in some ways. On the other hand, 100% of the certified teachers interviewed feel that there is not an adequate amount of feedback given on student discipline data, and that more needs to be done in this area in order decrease disciplinary infractions. The administrator also indicated that more professional development and consistency in how PBIS is implemented across the board is necessary in order for PBIS to effectively work in all settings.

In support of the teachers who feel that PBIS has a positive impact of students in some ways one teacher stated, “The students that have been involved with PBIS for a long time are aware of their behavior goals, and the days that they want to accomplish their goals students try very hard to do so.” In reference to the feedback and as stated by one of the teachers, “I think that can be improved as far as the feedback that teachers are getting on student behavior patterns.”

Additional Programs or Interventions in Conjunction with PBIS

Eighty percent of interviewees feel that PBIS, does work in some capacities in this alternative school setting. However, they feel more is needed in conjunction with PBIS in order for this systematic framework to be more impactful. The following statements provide insight on administrator and teacher perceptions regarding the need for more in conjunction with PBIS: The administrator stated, “I am sure other interventions along with PBIS are possibly needed and could also bring about better results in an alternative school setting in regard to the number of office referrals students receive in an alternative school setting.” One teacher stated, “For some students PBIS is not enough to motivate them.” Another teacher stated, I don’t think we are fully utilizing PBIS enough in the way that it needs to be, and I think if we were then we could see more positive changes in behavior and discipline problems, so because this is an alternative school I think we need to see more positive changes in behavior.”

One teacher indicated PBIS is not the appropriate approach for addressing behavior or academics in the alternative school setting. As stated by this teacher, “I am always open to new things, but I feel like PBIS is not working. I feel that something else should be put into place in this setting.”

All of the above themes indicate common perceptions, from the administrator and teachers, on PBIS implementation in the rural alternative school setting studied. The themes indicate how PBIS is perceived among the staff as it relates to student behavior, and from these themes are other areas of concern, in addition to behavior that emerged from the interviews. Not only does staff address behavior, but they also share a common interest in PBIS along with academics, attendance, ways in which varying disciplinary approaches can come into play among teachers, and also other programs that can be implement in conjunction with PBIS.

Concluding Results

Hypothesis testing associated with part one of this mixed methods study, failed to reject the null hypothesis and indicated that PBIS has no significant impact on the number of ODRs received by students in a rural alternative school setting after three years of implementation. Upon the analysis of quantitative data, qualitative data was collected by interviewing the administrator of this rural alternative school, along with interviewing four certified teachers.

The first part of the interview data was analyzed using a tool referred to as the SET, and this is a tool used to measure how well PBIS is being implemented in a school. Questions are scored according to a scoring guide and rubric, and results from the SET indicate whether or not a school is implementing PBIS with fidelity. A score of 80% or more would indicate that PBIS is being implemented with fidelity, anything less than this indicates a lack of fidelity. Additional interview questions were asked of the administrator and teachers. Interview data from additional question data was recorded and transcribed to check for accuracy in being able to report themes emerging from data.

Several themes emerged from this data providing clarity and insight on findings from hypothesis testing. Suggestions from staff were made indicating the need for more regarding the implementation of PBIS in an alternative school setting. Chapter five will provide discussions on findings, implications for further research, and recommendations for future studies on the implementation of PBIS in rural alternative school settings.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter five of this dissertation begins with a summary of the overall purpose of this study. This is followed by the discussion section covering the results obtained from both quantitative and qualitative findings of this study. Next, the chapter explains implications for further research on the implementation of PBIS in alternative school settings followed by the conclusion of this study.

Summary of the Research Study

The purpose of this study was first to determine what impact, if any, PBIS had on the number of ODRs received by students in a rural alternative school setting. The study was conducted following protocols for the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design; therefore, following the analysis of quantitative data, the next purpose of this study was to make sense of the quantitative findings by exploring administrative and certified teacher perspectives on the implementation of PBIS. In the first part of the study quantitative data was collected by obtaining ODR data, which was obtained from the SWIS database. After collecting this data, SPSS 25 was used to conduct ANOVA testing in order to test the hypothesis set at a 0.05 level of significance.

The second phase of the study explored administrative and certified teacher perspectives on the implementation of PBIS in the rural alternative school studied, and this required the

researcher to conduct qualitative interviews in order to better understand the impact of PBIS in the alternative school studied based on administrator and teacher feedback. The researcher's purpose for conducting these two forms of data was to have an in depth look at the impact PBIS has had on discipline in this alternative school through analyzing discipline data, followed by the exploration and analysis of the educators' perceptions of PBIS in this particular setting.

The following questions were raised in order to guide this study:

1. Does the implementation of PBIS, with an emphasis on student behavior, decrease the number of disciplinary referrals received by students after three years of implementation?
2. What are the administrator and certified staff perceptions of PBIS in the rural AEP, as it relates to student behavior, post implementation?

The participating alternative school selected for this study started PBIS implementation during the 2014-2015 school terms as a district-wide initiative to implement PBIS. The school district elected to implement PBIS in order to improve the overall behavioral and academic performance of students throughout the entire school district. Since the inception of PBIS, this framework has been used to decrease high levels of disciplinary issues in schools throughout the United States with the use of evidence-based interventions (Swain-Bradway, Pinkney, & Flannery, 2015). In addition to this, schools implementing PBIS have also seen increased academic performance among students by following guidelines and procedures associated with this three-tiered model (Horner & Sugai, 2015). Therefore, PBIS can be beneficial to school districts or schools striving to change the ways in which student discipline is addressed for the betterment of students and educators.

The participating school in this study has implemented PBIS with intent on decreasing disciplinary issues within the school. PBIS has also been implemented in this setting to also

encourage/motivate the students to strive for success, both behaviorally and academically, by exhibiting positive prosocial behaviors and also working to keep their grades up. The school principal, teachers, and staff all play critical roles in how successful, or not, the students are once they enroll in this rural alternative school setting.

Students are allowed to exit the alternative school when a committee meets to determine that behavior and academic goals have been met. Criteria for the success of students, in this alternative school are designed to follow tiered levels of support according to the PBIS framework. Whether or not students are meeting exit criteria is determined by having a committee that participates in exit meetings to verify how successful the student has been in meeting behavior goals/expectations along with maintaining their grades. If behavior goals, which are monitored daily according to tiers two and three data sources and behavior intervention plans, have not been met students cannot return to their host schools. In addition to this, students are not allowed to exit if all class averages are not at 65 or above, unless they received placement with a grade lower than a 65 prior to entry. A final decision regarding grades along with entry and exit criteria is made by administrators and school counselors.

On a weekly, monthly, and yearly basis, as part of PBIS implementation, students in this rural alternative school are given incentives when they demonstrate positive character traits, increase their academic performance, or when they demonstrate consistency in their behavior and academics from the time they are placed until the time they are released. As part of the reward system students are allowed to share ways in which they would like to be rewarded by teachers and the administrative staff. The reward system includes free snacks for students at the end of the week every Friday, if students have been present for three days without receiving any referrals for the week. Next, students are allowed to be student helpers by all teachers and staff

in the school if they earn the right to do so. Students can be selected as student of the month, if they are voted on by the staff; and they are allowed to receive lunch from a restaurant of their choice or receive up to a ten dollar reward if selected for student of the month. Students with perfect attendance names are placed in a bag, and at the end of the year one is drawn for a chance to get in a money machine. These incentives have been put in place to go along with the implementation of PBIS; however, findings from this study suggest incentives alone have not worked in decreasing the number of ODRs received by students in this AEP.

Summary of Findings

Quantitative Findings

Overall findings from hypothesis testing revealed there is no significant difference between the implementation of PBIS, and the number of ODRs received by students in this rural alternative school setting after three years of implementing PBIS. After the collection of baseline data, mean scores steadily increased for two years. During year three of implementation, the mean score average began to decline; however, this decline in numbers was not enough to show any significance within or between the groups tested. Therefore, in the analysis of the mean score differentials, PBIS has not impacted ODRs received by students during the timespan studied because the number of referrals received by students never declines below the baseline mean.

To answer question #1 of this study - “Does the implementation of PBIS, with an emphasis on student behavior, decrease the number of disciplinary referrals received by students in a rural alternative school setting after three years of implementation?” The implementation of PBIS, with an emphasis on student behavior, does not decrease the number of disciplinary referrals received by students in a rural alternative school setting after three years of

implementation. Several factors can contribute to the outcome of these findings. In order to determine what these factors possibly consist of, the researcher followed the quantitative part of this study up with a qualitative component.

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative data was collected by interviewing the principal of the alternative school studied along with interviewing four of the certified teachers in this school. The alternative school studied has a very small number of certified teachers, only five, eligible to participate in this study; however, the researcher was able to obtain interview data from four of the five teachers assigned to this school. One teacher left the staff and moved to another school; however, this teacher was contacted and agreed to participate in the study. Interview questions consisted of two parts with the first part of questions coming from the SET, and the second part were additional questions adopted from a previous study on PBIS.

The SET consisted of a total of 28 interview questions, and all of these questions were utilized for the purpose of this study. The researcher followed scoring guidelines for using the SET, and did not deviate from any of the questions asked to respondents. All questions were scored according to guidelines provided in the SET scoring document, and final scores from these questions, from seven features were calculated to come up with a mean score average. Calculations from conducting the SET indicate a score of 70%. According to Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd & Horner (2001), a score less than 80% on the SET indicates a lack of fidelity in how PBIS is implemented within the school. These findings appear to be consistent with findings from this studies hypothesis testing results previously discussed.

The next part of the interview was the additional questions asked after interview data was obtained for use of the SET. Additional questions were answered by the administrator and

certified teachers who participated in this study. From these additional questions, the researcher was able to explore emerging themes indicating administrator and teacher perceptions on the implementation of PBIS in this rural alternative school setting. Themes that emerged from these interviews, also indicated in chapter four, are as follows: Positive common language, PBIS motivates students with incentives, understanding of expectations, feedback and PBIS implementation, additional programs.

Each of the themes that emerged from interviews indicate PBIS implementation plays a pivotal role in how behavior and academics is managed in this alternative school setting; however, the administrator and the teachers acknowledge areas of concern in how well PBIS is being monitored and implemented to address behavior. The administrators and teachers were all provided data on the number of referrals that have been processed from the year of baseline and three years following. In looking at these numbers from one year to the next, the majority of the research participants were alarmed. Only one participant in this study felt wholeheartedly that PBIS does not work in this type of academic setting when it comes to changing behavior. Others suggest that PBIS generally works; however, the school should possibly consider ways in which minor disciplinary referrals are processed.

Discussion of Findings and Limitations

Findings from this mixed-methods study suggest several factors of consideration after the analysis of data. There was a change in administration after the year baseline data was collected. The change in administration could have an impact on how discipline data was accounted for once PBIS started in this school. There is no way of knowing how discipline data was fully accounted for during the tenure of the administrator responsible for baseline data. Therefore, data from the 2013-2014 could have possibly been underreported.

In addition to this, due to the transitory nature of students entering and exiting the alternative school, ODR data can be affected. Students who leave the alternative school, but return as repeat offenders can attribute to the spike in ODR data over time. The possibility of this causing a spike in ODRs could have impacted ODR data collected for hypothesis testing in this study. To address the possibility of this issue through analyzation of data associated with students who enter and exit this alternative school should be examined by breaking down ODR data student by student. This will allow researchers to examine how discipline data associated with one student can impact ODR data received by all students.

PBIS implementation in this rural alternative school setting, in terms of ODRs received by students, is in need of professional development from an outside agency to assist the school on ways to implement PBIS using best practices. In addition to this, an outside agency can provide the staff with professional development on alternative methods that can be used to address minor disciplinary infractions. ODR data revealed that the category of “other” which consisted of minor disciplinary infractions had very high numbers of infractions. An outside agency can also provide professional development on ways to implement proper interventions for students falling into tier two and three for behavior. Therefore, based on findings from this study, this rural alternative school setting can benefit from having ongoing professional development from an agency that has no connection to the school.

Next, based on themes emerging from this study, common ideas on ways in which PBIS has benefited students’ progress in behavior and academics were developed. There were also common thoughts shared on ways the implementation of PBIS could be better approached within this school setting. A total of five common themes emerged, providing more insight on how PBIS has been implemented in this school. The themes also shed light on reasons as to why

there has not been a tremendous decrease in disciplinary infractions but instead the opposite.

The following discussions of themes provide further insight on the perspectives given on PBIS in this rural alternative school setting.

Theme one of this study indicates that is common for teachers and administrators to use common language among students in this school. Emergence of this theme provides insight on how teachers and the administrator feel about appropriately talking to students and building rapport with students by modeling appropriate methods of communication. This theme could attribute to why the fidelity check percentage is only ten points away for the 80% needed to show implementation with fidelity.

Theme two of this study indicates that the administrator and teachers feel that PBIS does a good job of motivating students by way of incentives used to reward students for expected behaviors. In a qualitative study conducted by Cox (2019), students explain that PBIS best motivates students when teachers and staff consistently remind them of expectations and implement PBIS practices in manners that keep students focused on behavior. Exploratory findings from this study suggest that students are willing to accept incentives and rewards; however, students feel the need for consistency in how PBIS is monitored and implemented in order for their behaviors to remain positive.

Developments associated with theme two also suggest PBIS helps with attendance and grades due to policies that were changed simultaneously with PBIS. Staff in this rural alternative school feels students placed in the alternative school are motivated to attend school because they look forward to being rewarded each Friday if they have not missed a day of school for the week. In addition to this, some of the staff interviewed indicated that students also like working towards being possibly nominated for student of the month. Although these themes emerged

from the qualitative interview data, the study did not test the impact of PBIS on attendance. One limitation to future studies on the attendance of students in this AEP, is that all attendance data for students goes back to the students host school; therefore, attendance data for students placed in the alternative school would have to be collected from attendance records kept by individual teachers. Collecting data in this manner can bring about issues with obtaining accurate records of student attendance. Therefore, studies on the impact PBIS has on attendance in this school system would need to be examined in the high school or middle school settings to assure the accuracy of attendance data and results.

Theme three suggests that because of PBIS implementation in this AEP students know and understand what is expected of them in regard to behavior and academics. Although previous studies addressed in the literature review of this study suggests PBIS is a framework designed to enhance both behavior and academics in schools, findings from this study only addressed behavior. Therefore, there is insufficient evidence indicating the impact PBIS has on the academic achievement of students in the academic area studied. Additional research in support of this theme regarding academics is necessary due to the fidelity check data used in support of this study.

Emerging theme four shared views on how there needs to be more collaboration and feedback among the staff regarding ODR data reports. After interviewees had the opportunity to see ODR data from 2013-2017, they were surprised by the numbers. All of the teachers indicated that although discipline data is discussed in meetings on a weekly basis, they would like to have the opportunity to see more detailed discipline data. During weekly meetings, discussions regarding discipline addresses individual student discipline reports, places where disciplinary issues are starting to be a concern (ex. the cafeteria in the morning time), classes

where students are exhibiting more problems with behavior, and during dismissal. However, teachers expressed concerns with needing more in data discussions such as how many referrals were written in total for the week, month, or the entire school year. The administrator also expressed that more can be done regarding ways in which discipline data is discussed among the team to assist this AEP in finding ways to better address disciplinary infractions.

Additionally, the interviews provided insight on how the administrator and teachers feel about the lack of control they have in how referrals are written by colleagues. Concerns were expressed about the possibility of students receiving referrals for incidents that some feel should be corrected between the teacher and the student. However, the administrator expressed that teachers are supported when referrals are written, but there has to be sufficient evidence that the referrals are warranted. According to the principal of this AEP, teachers must be able to show that parent contact has been made, and that a log is being kept which documents student behavior and assignments. In order for PBIS to be implemented with fidelity, this means that there should be buy-in from all parties responsible for implementation of this multi-tiered framework (Marlin & Flice, 2013). If there are issues with buy-in from teachers, and if teachers fail to properly follow steps that should be implemented prior to writing students up for minor infractions, it is likely that PBIS implementation will lack fidelity. The fidelity check performed for the purpose of this study indicates implementation with a lack of fidelity which stands in support of concerns raised on how referrals are written.

The administrator also expressed that, even though there was an increase in disciplinary infractions in this school a number of factors could have contributed to this. One, there was a change in administration from after the baseline year of PBIS; therefore, the administrator has no definite knowledge of how ODRs were handled prior to the implementation of PBIS. Next, the

principal acknowledged that when programs are changed, such as changes in how discipline is addressed, it takes time for both students and teachers to adapt. The administrator feels that as a result of this change there was a spike in disciplinary issues due to both students and teachers trying to find ways to adapt to this systematic change. In addition to this, the administrator feels that as more time and efforts are put into PBIS, disciplinary infractions will improve in this rural AEP.

The last emerging theme from this data expresses the need from more interventions or programs to be put in place along with PBIS to provide students in this AEP with more intense forms of interventions. Interviewees feel that PBIS alone may not be sufficient for those students who have more issues with problematic behaviors. Therefore, they feel that other programs, along with PBIS, decrease high numbers of ODRs. One framework that this AEP can consider embedding into the PBIS model is a model known as restorative justice, but referred to in schools as restorative practices. According to SERC (n.d.) restorative practices allows those who have exhibited disciplinary offenses the opportunity to openly communicate with staff and others about their wrongdoing. Instead of focusing on ways to punish students, through restorative practices, the staff can focus on ways to provide interventions by building relationships with students. Restorative Practices, like PBIS, aims to help students learn effective problem solving strategies, build communication skills, and allows students the opportunity to accept responsibility by being able to face the wrong they have done among a group of individuals in support of the student. Like PBIS, in order for restorative practices to be successful, all parties responsible for implementing must be willing to do so with full buy-in and support (SERC, n.d.).

Another current wide-spread approach used to address the behavior of students in school is referred to as Social Emotional Learning (SEL). PBIS and SEL are both models that assist schools in addressing student behaviors, while also having a positive impact on the schools' culture and climate. SEL too can work in conjunction with PBIS to decrease disciplinary issues exhibited by students. According to Barrett, Eber, McIntosh, Perales, & Romer, (2018), SEL is defined as a model that teaches students ways to best manage the following: social and emotional issues, allows students to set and accomplish positive goals, teaches students ways to respect and have positive interactions with others, and it also teaches students to learn how to be responsible. PBIS and SEL models can be implemented by teaching all staff ways to embed SEL competencies into the PBIS framework. Like any other approach to addressing discipline embedding this model with PBIS will also need to be done with fidelity (Barrett, Eber, McIntosh, Perales, & Romer, 2018). Embedding SEL with PBIS is another option this rural AEP can consider to find ways to decrease ODRs, but outside and ongoing professional development is necessary in order to assist the school on ways to best implement both models.

Limitations

There were several limitations recognized as the researcher worked to complete this study. Each of these limitations are taken into consideration when thinking in terms of conducting further studies on the PBIS, or studies on behavior in an alternative educational program. First, because this study was conducted in school with very few faculty members and students it is very difficult to generalize this study to other academic programs. Next, this study only tested the impact of PBIS on ODRs received by students; however, several themes emerged from this study which also addressed academics, and there was no data on academics which could stand in support of themes suggested in regard to academics. Furthermore, the researchers

did not obtain IRB approval to interview students, and this is a limitation due to the fact that the SET requires students to answer two interview questions. These questions on the SET were scored at zero due the lack of student responses, and this could have had a negative impact on SET score data. Lastly, this school was limited to findings from one rural alternative school that has adopted PBIS as a model used to address behavior and academics; however, it would have been beneficial to examine two alternative schools implementing the PBIS framework.

Further Research Recommendations

Throughout this discussion, several ideas for future research on the rural alternative schools setting, with the implementation of PBIS coinciding with other models, the academic performance of students and PBIS in AEPs, along with the attendance of students placed in alternative schools has derived. Future studies on rural alternative school settings, discussing the impact of PBIS on ODRs and academics is necessary; however, a study of this nature should be able to present evidence of fidelity checks from an outside agency prior to being conducted. In addition to this, a study which focuses on student perceptions of PBIS and academics is needed in order to provide insight on how students feel they benefit from the implementation of programs such as PBIS in alternative school settings. Another study that will provide literature to the field of alternative education would be to conduct a qualitative study indicating student perceptions on interventions that have best worked to change their problematic behaviors in alternative school settings in conjunction with behavior intervention plans and check-in check-out.

Studies on each of the aforementioned topics can contribute to the field of education, and can also assist educators in finding ways to better address the needs of students placed in alternative education programs. Additionally studies on these topics are also necessary in order

to assist teachers and administrators in finding ways to best support students placed in alternative schools. The field of education is limited on studies conducted in alternative schools; more studies in this area of education can be beneficial to students, educators, parents, and all stakeholders responsible for the education of students with behavioral deficits.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Approval

irb@olemiss.edu <irb@olemiss.edu>
To: ALINA HARGES <amharges@go.olemiss.edu>
Cc: "Denise A. Soares" <dasoares@olemiss.edu>

Wed, May 15, 2019 at 7:56 AM

PI:

This is to inform you that your application to conduct research with human participants, "Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports Impact on Discipline in an Alternative School" (Protocol #19x-284), has been approved as Exempt under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(#1, 2).

Please remember that all of The University of Mississippi's human participant research activities, regardless of whether the research is subject to federal regulations, must be guided by the ethical principles in The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research.

It is especially important for you to keep these points in mind:

- You must protect the rights and welfare of human research participants.
- Any changes to your approved protocol must be reviewed and approved before initiating those changes.
- You must report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others.
- If research is to be conducted during class, the PI must email the instructor and ask if they wish to see the protocol materials (surveys, interview questions, etc) prior to research beginning.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the IRB at irb@olemiss.edu.

Miranda L. Core

Research Compliance Specialist, Research Integrity and Compliance

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

The University of Mississippi

100 Barr Hall

University, MS 38677-1848

+1-662-915-7482

irb@olemiss.edu | www.olemiss.edu

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Letter

Dear Superintendent or Administrative Personnel:

My name is Alina M. Harges, and I am currently a doctoral candidate at The University of Mississippi. I am working toward completing my dissertation at the University of Mississippi in the department of Teacher Education. My dissertation, Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports Impact on Discipline in an Alternative School examines what impact, if any, PBIS has on student discipline data in the alternative school setting. Studies on PBIS implementation indicate increased needs to address behavior in schools, PBIS has become a necessity for school districts to provide all students with learning environments which are orderly, safe, and conducive to learning (Bradshaw & Pas, 2011). Therefore, in order to build and create positive school environments, school districts implement PBIS with the use of research-based interventions for the betterment of their students and schools in regard to education and discipline. I am asking your permission to conduct my study in your school district, and I would like to collect data during the month of May, 2019.

You are asked to allow the researcher access to student discipline data as it pertains to your alternative education program. Discipline data needs to be obtained from Mississippi School-wide Information System (MSIS) and the School-wide Information System (SWIS). No identifying information (i.e. student names, gender, teacher names, etc.) will be included in data collected in this study. In addition to this, the school district's name will not be associated with any aspect of data collected in this study. The collection and analyzation of discipline data will be followed up with interviews from alternative school staff (i.e. administrator and teachers), and no identifying information will be tied to any interviewed school personnel.

Your willingness to participate in this study will greatly further research to determine the impact PBIS has on discipline in this rural alternative school setting. I will use my findings to further examine the implementation of PBIS in alternative school settings. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and presents no risk to students, teachers, administrators, or the school district.

Thank you for considering my study. If you have any questions and/or concerns, please feel free to contact me or the chair of my dissertation committee.

Investigator

Alina M. Harges, Ed.S
Department of Teacher Education
317 Guyton Hall
The University of Mississippi
(662) 809-7448

Advisors

Nichelle Boyd-Robinson, Ed.D.
Department of Teacher Education
317 Guyton Hall
The University of Mississippi
(662) 915-7636

Dr. Denise Soares, Ph.D
Department of Teacher Education
317 Guyton Hall
The University of Mississippi
(662) 915-7350

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Alina M. Harges, Ed.S

Doctoral Candidate, University of Mississippi

APPENDIX C

Information Letters

TEACHER INFORMATION SHEET

Title: ***Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports Impact on Discipline in an Alternative School***

Investigator

Alina Harges
Department of Teacher Education
317 Guyton Hall
The University of Mississippi
(662) 809-7448

Advisor

Nichelle Boyd-Robinson, Ed.D.
Department of Teacher Education
317 Guyton Hall
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(662) 915-7350

Dr. Denise Soares, Ph.D
Department of Teacher Education
317 Guyton Hall
The University of Mississippi
(662) 915-7350

INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING ONLY IF YOU ARE COLLECTING DATA EXCLUSIVELY FROM ADULTS

☐ *By checking this box I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.*

Description

Provide a brief description of your research. A few sentences should be adequate. [Example: The purpose of this research project is to determine what impact, if any, does the implementation of PBIS have on student discipline data in a rural alternative school setting. I would like to interview you regarding your perceptions of PBIS implementation in this alternative school setting. You will not be asked for your name or any other identifying information.

Cost and Payments

While we understand that your time is very valuable, it will take you approximately 45 minutes to complete this interview.

Risks and Benefits

We do not think that there are any risks associated with the interview questions in this study. Instead, we feel teachers will benefit from having the opportunity to answer questions associated with the implementation of PBIS in this rural alternative school selected for participation in this study.

Confidentiality

No identifiable information will be recorded; therefore, we do not think you can be identified from this study. Interviews will be coded in order to omit the use of names/identifiable information from interview questions. Recorded interviews will only be assessable to the researcher for the use of notes and accurate transcriptions.

Right to Withdraw

You do not have to take part in this study, and you may stop participation at any time. If you start the study and decide that you do not want to finish, all you have to do is to tell Mrs. Alina Harges (Primary Researcher), Dr. Nichelle Boyd-Robinson, or Dr. Denise Soares (Research Advisors) in person, by letter, or by telephone (contact information listed above). You may skip any questions you prefer not to answer during the Interview.

IRB Approval*****must be included as written*****

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

Statement of Consent

I have read and understand the above information. By completing the interview, I consent to participate in the study.

ADMINISTRATOR INFORMATION SHEET

Title: ***Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports Impact on Discipline in an Alternative School***

Investigator

Alina Harges
Department of Teacher Education
317 Guyton Hall
The University of Mississippi
(662) 809-7448

Advisors

Nichelle Boyd-Robinson, Ed.D.
Department of Teacher Education
317 Guyton Hall
The University of Mississippi
(662) 915-7350

Dr. Denise Soares, Ph.D
Department of Teacher Education
317 Guyton Hall
The University of Mississippi
(662) 915-7350

*INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING ONLY IF YOU ARE COLLECTING DATA EXCLUSIVELY FROM ADULTS
By checking this box I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.*

☐

Description

Provide a brief description of your research. A few sentences should be adequate. [Example: The purpose of this research project is to determine what impact, if any, does the implementation of PBIS have on student discipline data in a rural alternative school setting. I would like to interview you regarding your perceptions of PBIS implementation in this alternative school setting. You will not be asked for your name or any other identifying information.

Cost and Payments

While we understand that your time is very valuable, it will take you approximately 45 minutes to complete this interview.

Risks and Benefits

We do not think that there are any risks associated with the interview questions in this study. Instead, we feel teachers will benefit from having the opportunity to answer questions associated with the implementation of PBIS in this rural alternative school selected for participation in this study.

Confidentiality

No identifiable information will be recorded; therefore, we do not think you can be identified from this study. Interviews will be coded in order to omit the use of names/identifiable information from interview questions. Recorded interviews will only be assessable to the researcher for the use of notes and accurate transcriptions.

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You do not have to take part in this study, and you may stop participation at any time. If you start the study and decide that you do not want to finish, all you have to do is to tell Mrs. Alina Harges (Primary Researcher), Dr. Nichelle Boyd-Robinson, or Dr. Denise Soares (Research Advisors) in person, by letter, or by telephone (contact information listed above). You may skip any questions you prefer not to answer during the interview.

IRB Approval

must be included as written

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

Statement of Consent

I have read and understand the above information. By completing the interview, I consent to participate in the study.

APPENDIX D

Permission to use Interview Questions

ALINA HARGES <amharges@go.olemiss.edu>
To: brenda.tracy@nsdtitans.org

Sun, Feb 3, 2019 at 4:09 PM

Dear Brenda,

Good afternoon, and first let me start this email by introducing myself to you. My name is Alina Harges, and I am currently a doctoral student at the University of Mississippi seeking my Ph.D in Special Education. I am now working on my dissertation titled: The Impact of Positive Behavior Intervention and Support on Student Infractions in a Rural Alternative School.

In looking for dissertations similar to my chosen topic, I was fortunate to have been able to find your dissertation online, and I was pleased to see that your research design follows the one appropriate for my dissertation as well. I enjoyed reading your dissertation, and I have learned a lot of valuable information from the content presented in your dissertation as well. You did an excellent job with this study.

Because your interview questions are deemed reliable and valid, I am reaching out to you in hopes of being able to seek your permission to use these interview questions to interview teachers and administrators in the school district I have selected for my study. Please feel free to contact me to ask further questions if necessary regarding my work, and I do looking forward to hearing back from you. I can be reached by replying to this email, and another email address for me is as follows: alinaautry@hotmail.com

Sincerely,

Alina Harges

Brenda Tracy <brenda.tracy@nsdtitans.org>
To: ALINA HARGES <amharges@go.olemiss.edu>

Tue, Feb 12, 2019 at 12:55 PM

Alina,

First of all, congratulations on your work for your PhD in Special Education. I am honored that you have requested to use my interview questions so please feel free to do so. I would be interested in your findings when your dissertation is complete so please let me know when it is finished and where I might be able to access the manuscript.

Thank you again and best wishes
Brenda

Brenda Tracy, EdD
Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Director
Special Education Director
W: 402.791.0000 x2001
M: 402.416-3328
E: brenda.tracy@nsdtitans.org
25211 South 68th Street
Firth, Nebraska, 68358

VITA

Alina Michelle Harges, a native of Grenada, Mississippi, has been a public school educator for the past eighteen years. She completed elementary and secondary education in Holly Springs School District, where she contributes each of her educational achievements and endeavors. Upon completion of high school, Alina enrolled in The University of Mississippi, located in Oxford, MS. She completed her Bachelor's, Master's, and Specialist degrees all from the University of Mississippi.

Alina started her teaching career as a fifth grade teacher in Holly Springs, MS in August of 2001. She moved on to teach elementary school in other MS school districts prior to becoming a secondary Special Education teacher. Before becoming a secondary education teacher, Alina desired to receive a doctorate degree in Special Education, and she enrolled in this program at the University of Mississippi.

While enrolled in the Ph.D program, at the University of Mississippi, Alina has had the opportunity to present at several state, national, and international teacher education conferences. In addition to this, she was able to become published along with the help of her research advisor. In the fall of 2019, Alina will begin her first tenure track position as Assistant Professor of Reading Literacy at Mississippi University for Women.